

to make out a case for precognition that I have written this paper, but to suggest that discussions of precognition or any other form of ESP are, in the old phrase, 'taking the spring out of the year,' if they neglect the mass of material to be found in the scripts published and discussed in numerous volumes of *Proceedings*.

POSTSCRIPT

When in my comments on H.V. 93 of July 20, 1908 I wrote that 'for the idea of a maiden's death being a sort of marriage confirmation could probably be formed in several passages of literature, I might have mentioned the song, *Proud Maisie*, that Madge Wildfire sings on her death-bed in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Ten lines of this song, including the first eight lines, were quoted by H.V. in a spoken 'script' (H.V. 600) dictated to me on January 5, 1924. Lines 5-8 are as follows:

'Tell me, thou bonny bird,
When shall I marry me?'
— 'When six braw gentlemen
Kirkward shall carry ye.'

Briefer references to the same song had previously been made in Mrs Verrall's scripts.

Madge Wildfire, though unmarried, was not herself a maiden, but there is nothing to show that *Proud Maisie* was not.

The hymn quoted in Mac. 1 is by Heber, and takes its imagery from Canticles II, 1. The first stanza is:

By cool Siloam's shady rill
How sweet the lily grows!
How sweet the breath beneath the hill
Of Sharon's dewy rose!

The second stanza begins 'Lo, such the child . . .', and the third stanza ends thus:

The rose that blooms beneath the hill
Must shortly fade away.

The appropriateness of the quotation to the impending death of a child needs no comment.

The next reference to the Rose of Sharon in a 'scriptic' context is in a comment by Mrs Stuart Wilson on a visual impression she had on July 7, 1915. Her record of this impression, which is typical of the usual form of her automatism, is as follows:

Very insistently a conventional rose with five petals . . . a design you see in churches. Perhaps it is the rose of Sharon.

W.H.S.

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WILLIAM CROOKES AND THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA OF MEDIUMSHIP

BY R. G. MEDHURST AND K. M. GOLDNEY

The authors are indebted to Mr Mostyn Gilbert for having suggested this project, and for having carried out investigations in connection with it. He wishes it to be known, however, that he does not necessarily concur in the present authors' interpretation of the evidence, and reserves the right to publish his own interpretation.

Note: References to some of the original material found by the authors in the course of their researches and originating in the files of the Society have appeared recently in various publications. The Society wishes it to be understood that this was done without the consent either of the authors or of the Society.

'For nearly twenty-five years I have been attacked on account of these experiments, and I have not replied. All the attacks I have seen have been criticisms of one or two isolated experiments or statements I have made, with an entire avoidance of other passages which would explain the former. They have been written more with the object of showing I was wrong and untrustworthy than with the object of getting at the real truth. . . . When the 'higher criticism' appears in which *all* I have written on the subject is compared, collated and reviewed, I have no anxiety as to the result.'

SIR WILLIAM CROOKES, *Journal S.P.R.*
Vol. IX, November 1900, p. 324

'It is almost as difficult to resist the testimony as it is to accept the things testified.'

SIR OLIVER LODGE, *Proceedings S.P.R.*
Vol. XVII, March 1902, p. 45

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I. INTRODUCTION

MR W. H. Salter prefaces his review¹ of the recent book² by Trevor Hall with the words: 'In the long history, and pre-history, of psychical research there is no single episode of more crucial importance than the series of sittings held by Crookes with Florence Cook as medium between some date in December 1873 and 21st May 1874.' One cannot but agree: the status of Sir William Crookes, both by reason of his very distinguished scientific career and his long tenure of the Presidency of our Society, makes his sponsorship of Florence Cook's remarkable phenomena a matter of the first importance. Trevor Hall, in a recent article,³ takes the Society to task for never having 'initiated and published any appraisal' of the Florence Cook episode.

Certainly, we are all under a debt of gratitude to Trevor Hall for having re-directed our attention to the very important, and very difficult, problem of the evidential status of the physical phenomena produced so copiously by the nineteenth-century mediums. He has done a valuable service in acquainting the contemporary reader (who is unlikely, now, to be familiar with such earlier critics as Podmore⁴ and McCabe⁵) with some of the more remarkable (and occasionally suspicious) details of Florence Cook's mediumistic career. In addition, the student is in his debt for an astute piece of detective work in bringing to light the important Blackburn correspondence. It is all the more unfortunate that Trevor Hall's book is marred by occasional inaccuracies in his treatment of recorded evidence and by a very extensive admixture of conjecture (not always well founded). It is not always easy for a reader who is not specially attentive to distinguish what is ascertained fact from what is merely the author's guess as to what may conceivably have happened. *The Spiritualists* has as its thesis the hypothesis that Crookes was infatuated with the eighteen-year-old Florence Cook; that she was his mistress; and that he collaborated with her in fraud to protect her from scandal and to give cover to their relationship. The book is so completely a Prosecutor's Case that readers will find it difficult to resist the impression, rightly or

¹ *Journal S.P.R.*, 41, September 1962.

² *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes*, by Trevor H. Hall, Duckworth, London, 1962.

³ *Tomorrow*, London, Winter, 1962.

⁴ F. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism* (two volumes), Methuen, London, 1902.

⁵ Joseph McCabe, *Spiritualism: A Popular History from 1847*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1920.

wrongly, that Trevor Hall had decided in advance on a verdict of 'Guilty' and thereafter set out to present the facts he needed to establish this verdict.

It will be useful to say, at the outset, that, in our opinion, the situation was far more complex than Trevor Hall's book would suggest. We have been able to clarify some points. For example, we appear to have cleared up the matter of the un-named medium's confession mentioned by Cox in a letter to Home, and mistakenly attributed by Hall to Florence Cook: and, incidentally, an explanation for Crookes's final abandonment of this phase of his work has now appeared. However, we do not pretend to have reached a final conclusion. Remarkable things were happening in the second half of the nineteenth century, on one level or another. Either they constitute an extension, having far-reaching implications, of the field of phenomena recognized by physical science, or they represent an astonishing failure of human testimony. Much of the evidence necessary to reach a satisfactory judgment has been lost, one can only hope not permanently; but enough remains to make it certain that no easy judgment is possible. In the present paper we intend to present a selection, as extensive as space will allow, of evidence that, in our opinion, it is impossible to neglect when assessing these events. Since so much of the relevant material is either unpublished or only available with great difficulty, it has seemed to us that we could do the greatest service to the student by restricting our comment to the minimum and quoting as fully as possible from contemporary sources. We have, by and large, selected material that we feel is important from the point of view of the evidential status of these remarkable events. However, we have also included several narratives that are not necessarily of high evidential standing, but do help to establish the atmosphere of the period.

In the course of this work we have accumulated a considerable quantity of quotations and references for which space could not be found in the present report. **A file of this material will be deposited in the Society's rooms for study by those interested.**

Before we embark on the specific business of this paper, a few general comments will be worth making.

Psychical Research, like many other human activities, passes through phases in which, not necessarily for logical reasons, certain aspects appear both plausible and fashionable and others drop into discredit. In our field, the so-called 'mental' phenomena (telepathy, clairvoyance and, by a slightly unlikely extension, psychokinesis on a purely laboratory scale) have, by and large, won sufficiently wide acceptance to be not infrequently taken as a

matter of course. This is the 'respectable' branch of the subject. Physical phenomena of the more spectacular kind (levitation, materialization, direct voice, etc.) have so far fallen into disrepute as to be regarded with scepticism even by many convinced Spiritualists. At this point of time, it requires an imaginative effort of some difficulty to project one's mind into a period when physical phenomena dominated the Spiritualistic scene.

It is important to realize that whereas in our day men of the calibre of Sir William Crookes or the 3rd Lord Rayleigh, if they were to interest themselves in paranormal phenomena, would fairly certainly gravitate to ESP research, the natural focus of interest in the 1870's was the variety of violent effects surrounding the physical mediums. The shift of interest has been so radical that the critic often finds it sufficient merely to quote accounts by contemporary witnesses in order to make the allegedly observed phenomena of nineteenth-century seances appear ridiculous to the modern reader.

It may help to supply a certain corrective if we bear in mind that mediums of repute, whose productive life-times have extended well into the 'respectable' period of psychical research, have not failed to produce phenomena as startling as those of Florence Cook. An example that immediately comes to mind is that of Mrs Osborne Leonard, one of the two outstanding mental mediums of the present century, who has worked closely with this Society and is still, happily, a member of it. In her autobiography¹ she relates how, early on in her career as a medium, she saw a hairy arm, which materialized at one of her seances and attempted to strangle a sitter. It is by no means obvious why we should treat this episode as an absurdity at the same time as we give serious attention to Mrs Leonard's trance communications. It is tempting to conjecture that this aspect of Mrs Leonard's mediumship remained undeveloped solely because the contemporary climate of opinion had turned against this class of phenomena.

Again, the remarkable communications received by Dr S. G. Soal through the medium Blanche Cooper are rightly regarded as of considerable evidential importance. It is not, perhaps, sufficiently stressed that these communications are reported to have been given through the mechanism of 'direct voice' and to the accompaniment of 'spirit lights'. Both of these are classes of events in the nineteenth-century tradition of 'physical phenomena' and now very much out of fashion.

An immediate difficulty that stands out in judging Crookes's

¹ Gladys Osborne Leonard, *My Life in Two Worlds*, Cassell, London, 1931, pp. 32-6.

work is what one might call his remarkable luck. Over and over again we find (with, as we shall see, one exception) that mediums who gave poor or outrightly suspicious results with other investigators produced for Crookes striking and apparently fraud-proof phenomena. This is disconcerting, and if the same were found to be true of Crookes's work in the physical sciences, one would certainly regard his activities with the gravest suspicion. Psychical phenomena are, however, elusive in the extreme, and such a state of affairs is not without parallel. One recalls Dr S. G. Soal's very diversified series of researches, extending over a great many years: this distinguished experimenter has shared with Crookes to an impressive degree the ability to obtain important and evidential results where other workers could find nothing. On the other side of the coin, one recalls some striking card-guessing experiments involving our current President, Dr D. J. West, which seem to suggest that an 'inhibiting' experimenter may destroy a paranormal effect even though he has no direct contact with the subject.¹

We conclude this introduction by commenting briefly on the related topics of the reliability of testimony and the problem of assessing the value and the implications of evidence of fraud by particular mediums.

Much recorded testimony by Crookes, Barrett, Alfred Russel Wallace and many others, concerns paranormal events under such apparently fraud-proof conditions as, taken at face value, would put the reality of the physical phenomena of mediumship beyond dispute. On the other hand, there is a substantial body of evidence² suggesting that it is possible for seance room testimony to

¹ *Journal S.P.R.*, November-December 1953. It should be added that in this instance the 'inhibiting' effect appeared to be confined to the more marginal scorers since the star subject was successful in producing significant results even when Dr West prepared the targets.*

² See, for example, the Report of the Seybert Commission, America, 1887, (pp. 150-1) in which Dr H. H. Furness remarked:

'Again and again men have led round the circles the materialised spirits of their wives and introduced them to each visitor in turn; fathers have taken round their daughters, and I have seen widows sob in the arms of their dead husbands. Testimony such as this staggers me; have I been smitten with colour-blindness? Before me, as far as I can detect, stands the very medium herself, in shape, size, form, and feature true to a line; and yet, one after another, honest men and women at my side, within ten minutes of each other assert that she is the absolute counterpart of their nearest and dearest friends, nay that she is that friend. It is as incomprehensible to me as the assertion that the heavens are green and the leaves of the trees deep blue.'

It should be added that we have no information regarding Dr Furness's abilities as an observer. He says of himself that he found it difficult to attend seances without being recognized because 'my ear-trumpet soon makes me a marked man', though of course his vision may have been acute.

be strangely unreliable. Should we, then, take the easy course of rejecting out of hand all testimony which fails to coincide with whatever we happen to expect? Some early and distinguished investigators inclined towards this attitude and, of course, they did have a certain advantage in being personally acquainted with the mediums and the experimenters. At this distance of time we must balance probabilities as best we can. We shall see later that there is reason for suggesting that the whole of the testimony of one group of investigators, in the 1870's, may have been fabricated. On the other hand some of the witnesses we shall quote can hardly be treated in this off-hand way.

An allied problem is the very thorny question of 'exposures'. The prevailing tendency (reflected in Trevor Hall's book) is to take any and all published accounts of exposures at their face value and as damning to the medium. But surely these episodes must be subjected to the same careful scrutiny as any other aspect of this strange chapter in human history.* We shall see later that the background to some of these exposures has its murky side, and one may often hesitate, here as elsewhere, to come to any firm conclusion.

Suppose, however, a medium is caught undeniably in fraud, either deliberate or possibly unconscious. Does that mean that thereafter she should be excluded from investigation? Opinion in the Society, during the heyday of the physical mediums, was rather sharply divided on this point.¹ The Sidgwicks, on the one hand, seem to have taken the firm view that no further work should be undertaken with any medium under suspicion of fraud. Lodge and, to a certain extent, Myers had a different attitude to this problem. In his autobiography (*Past Years*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1931, p. 309), Lodge put the official point of view in this way: 'The practice of the S.P.R. was that, once a medium was detected in any kind of deception, he or she must be ruled out of court.' Lodge's own attitude is made clear by the following account (*Past Years*, p. 295) of trickery used by Eusapia Palladino.

I don't say that our hand-holding at these early times was all that could be desired, for afterwards it was found that she had a trick of dodging the holder's hands, so that one held the back of one hand, while the other held the front, thus liberating her other hand for doing whatever was necessary. It is difficult to make this trick clear; but I have found it possible to accomplish it in the dark (and the sittings were in the dark) and I verified afterwards that Eusapia was

¹ See, for example, *The Possibilities of Mal-Observation in Relation to Evidence for the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, by C. C. Massey, *Proc. S.P.R.*, 4, 1886-7, and the following discussion between Massey and Professor Sidgwick.

rather accomplished at this little deception, which, when found out, disgusted Myers so that he refused to have anything more to do with her. But I think she only resorted to this trick when the power was failing or was very weak; and then the things she did with her loose hand were only those within her reach. Sometimes, even at that early date, we were doubtful about the hand-holding, and afterwards expressed to Eusapia this doubt, saying, about one incident, that we were not sure that she didn't have her hand loose. Upon this she flew into one of her Neapolitan rages, implying that she could not retain control of herself when in trance, and saying words equivalent to these: 'Here am I taking all this trouble to show you these phenomena, and you don't even hold my hands so that I cannot do them normally: it is too bad!' The suggestion was that her organism was trying, under control, to get some physical things done, and that in the effort, if any normal means were available, or if she could contrive to utilise normal means, she would do it in that way. She wanted us to understand that it was not conscious deception, but that her control took whatever means were available, and, if he found an easy way of doing a thing, thus it would be done.¹

Father Herbert Thurston, in the course of a careful analysis of the 'Katie King' affair in his book *The Church and Spiritualism*, (Milwaukee, 1933), goes rather further. He does not exclude the possibility of genuine phenomena being produced even by mediums who are capable of *conscious* fraud. He says:

Let us confess that the whole subject is infinitely puzzling. Having Mr. Feilding's report of the Naples sittings with Eusapia Palladino before our eyes² not to speak of numerous other séances held by Eusapia with her Italian fellow countrymen, it is difficult to maintain that a medium who notoriously cheats is incapable of producing genuine phenomena. For this reason the fact that 'Dr.' Monck, for example, was detected in flagrant and seemingly premeditated imposture, does not conclusively prove that all the materialisations ascribed to him were equally fakes. The number of exposures which were recorded at that period make it hard to believe that any materializing medium was honest or trustworthy; but, on the other hand, the psychological mystery presented by the testimony of such a man as Dr. A. Russel Wallace, who shares with Darwin the repute of

¹ In this connection, also, we should note Lodge's discussion (*Proc., S.P.R.*, 34, p. 93) regarding Richet's experiments with Eusapia on the Isle Ribaud, 1894. He comments regarding the earlier Cambridge experiments: 'Myers was disgusted with her. . . . But later on at Richet's invitation Myers was prevailed on to see her again in more congenial surroundings, and his confidence in her possession of real powers — however much when under difficulties she might try to eke them out — was restored.'

² *Proceedings S.P.R.*, 23, 1909, pp. 306-569. This is the report of the Committee consisting of Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally and Hereward Carrington, sent by the Society to Naples to investigate Eusapia. With full knowledge of Eusapia's previous use of trickery, they still brought back a favourable verdict.

having given birth to our modern evolution theories, is not less embarrassing.

We should say that we have assumed that readers of this paper will be familiar with Sir William Crookes's *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*.¹ We have also assumed some familiarity with the contents of Trevor Hall's recent book. Otherwise, we have, so far as possible, attempted to make this paper self-contained.

Finally a word of warning. We shall frequently have occasion to refer both to *The Spiritualist* and to *The Spiritualists*. In spite of the near coincidence of names, these are very different entities and not to be confused! The first is the Spiritualist newspaper edited by W. H. Harrison and published in the 70's and 80's of the last century, and the second is the recent book by Trevor Hall.

2. 'JOHN KING' AND 'KATIE KING'

Nineteenth-century Spiritualism cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of the dominating role of 'John King' and 'Katie King'. We shall discuss this topic briefly, without attempting to follow out its ramifications in detail.

'John King', often claiming to have been in life the buccaneer Sir Henry Owen Morgan, was a sort of universal Control as was his 'wife', 'Katie King', and his 'daughter', another 'Katie King', who purported to have been in life Annie Owen Morgan. There was hardly a prominent medium throughout the second half of the nineteenth century who did not number among his principal Controls a John or Katie King.² As early as 1861, Madame Blav-

¹ This, one of the most important books in the literature of psychical research, is regrettably out of print. It was first published in 1874 by James Burns, the editor of *The Medium and Daybreak*. More recent editions appeared in 1926 (Two Worlds Publishing Co., Manchester) and in 1953 (Psychic Book Club, London). Sir William Barrett says of the *Researches* that 'this reprint of Crookes's papers and letters was published without his authority or revision' (*Proceedings S.P.R.*, 31, p. 26). However, Crookes himself remarks: 'In the year 1874 I published in a collected form various papers dating from 1870 to 1874. . . . (*Proceedings S.P.R.*, 6, p. 98), and this clearly refers to the *Researches*. On November 14, 1911 Crookes wrote to Dr Hyslop: 'It is true that I am contemplating a detailed account of my experiments with D. D. Home and other mediums. . . . I do not wish the old and imperfect accounts I gave in journals about 35 years ago to be published more than they have been.' And in another letter to Sir Oliver Lodge dated March 15, 1913 he writes: 'My object has been, not to write a new book, but to extend and amplify what has already been published so as to be able to call it a new book, and so stop the unauthorised sale of the reprints of my old papers. I have been offered £1,000 by a publisher for this, or I could publish it on my own account and thus secure profits which are now going to pirates. My time is so fully occupied that I have had no time to do more than think about it.' (Both these letters are in the Lodge collection.)

² D. D. Home is a notable exception.

atsky is reputed to have had a John King Control.¹ Other 'John King' mediums included the Davenport Brothers, the Koons family, Mrs Marshall, Mrs Guppy, Mr and Mrs Nelson Holmes, Herne, Williams, Rosina Showers, Husk, Mrs Wriedt, Eusapia Palladino and very many more. It is thus not surprising that one of the 'King' family should have been numbered among Florence Cook's familiars; by an odd historical accident Florence's 'Katie' is remembered while the universal character of the 'Katie' manifestation has been forgotten.

From the 1850's onwards 'John King' was associated with violent telekinetic phenomena (e.g. through the Koons family) and with communications both written and via 'direct voice' (e.g. through Mrs Kellog and Miss Jay of New York). Full form materializations seem not to have occurred until the '70's (notably through Herne and Williams).

In one form or another, 'John King' and 'Katie King' have persisted up to recent times. In 1924, for example, we find 'John King' assisting 'Feda', Mrs Leonard's Control, in the production of voices (H. Dennis Bradley, *The Wisdom of the Gods*, Laurie, London, 1925, p. 103). Sir Oliver Lodge, in a letter to a Mr A. J. G. Fletcher dated November 30, 1928, remarked: 'I have had many talks with John King; indeed my wife regards him as rather a friend.' Dr Hans Gerloff in a lecture in London in October 1963 claimed that both 'John King' and 'Katie King' have several times in the last few years appeared at sittings with the Danish medium Einer Nielsen.

Certainly, no other Control has been so catholic in his choice of mediums. There is perhaps a certain parallel in the 'Myers' Control, though his range of mediums has been much more limited and his activities restricted to spoken communication using the medium's voice and to automatic writing. Early on, as the 'John King' mediums multiplied, there seems to have been an expectation that 'John King' had sufficient continuity to allow conversations with him to be sustained from one medium to the next. When this was found not to be possible, some prominent Spiritualists came to feel that 'John King' was a pseudonym for a group of Controls, or was even a designation for something more impersonal, a 'symbol of power'. Presumably in many instances mediums produced 'John King' to conform with the fashion of the times and thereby increase attendances at their sittings.² Whatever its real significance, the 'John King' influence was one of the most pervasive and lasting in the history of Spiritualism.

¹ H. S. Olcott, *People from the Other World*, Hartford, U.S.A., 1875, p. 454.

² See, for example, *Confessions of a Medium*, Griffith & Farran, London, 1882.

3. CROOKES'S SITTINGS WITH KATE FOX AND CHARLES WILLIAMS

Crookes's *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* gives only a very partial indication of the extent of his work with the physical mediums. His energy must have been prodigious and in the period covering 1870 to 1875 he undoubtedly attended more seances of this kind than any technically qualified investigator before or since. Almost all of the prominent mediums of the period come within his scope. In the unfortunate absence of any comprehensive account of Crookes's work, an impression has built up that he carried out a careful series of tests with D. D. Home, followed this by an uncritical period with Florence Cook, and, immediately after, turned away from the subject. This is far from a true picture. Even though much vital documentation has tragically disappeared, enough remains to reconstruct the main lines of Crookes's activities, as we shall show in this and later sections.

Crookes was much impressed by the importance of the experimenter having undisputed control of the seance conditions and, so far as possible, he tried to engage promising mediums for prolonged series of tests in his own home. In all, we have record of five such runs of sittings, the mediums being, in chronological order, D. D. Home, Kate Fox, Charles Edward Williams, Florence Cook and Mrs Annie Eva Fay. Besides these, Crookes contrived to sit with Mrs Marshall, J. J. Morse, Mrs St Claire, the Holmes, Herne, Mrs Everitt, the Reverend Stainton Moses, Mrs Mary M. Hardy, Miss Showers and many others.

All this activity did not go unnoticed in the scientific world. Crookes has recorded very amusingly, in his *Researches*, the venomous hostility of such men as Dr Carpenter. But among some others of higher intellectual calibre Crookes's work caused a great deal of anxious perplexity. No less a man than Charles Darwin, writing to Francis Galton on January 23, 1872, says:¹ 'Have you seen Mr. Crookes? I hope to Heaven you have, as I for one should feel entire confidence in your conclusion', and in a letter to Lady Derby, also quoted by Pearson, he adds: 'If you had called here after I had read the article [probably Crookes's *Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena called Spiritual*, Quarterly Journal of Science, 1874], you would have found me a much perplexed man. I cannot disbelieve Mr. Crookes's statements, nor can I believe in his results.'

¹ Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1924, p. 147.

Henry Sidgwick, in a letter to his mother¹ dated July 11, 1874, quotes a friend as saying: 'There are only three alternatives — Crookes is either affirming a tissue of purposeless lies, or a monomaniac, or the phenomena are true'.

Some eminent scientific men, as we shall see, were stimulated to make more active enquiries into these disturbing matters. Included among these were Lord Rayleigh, William Huggins and Francis Galton. They emerged from their experiences with very varying degrees of belief or the reverse.

Of Crookes's five main series of experiments, the best documented is that over the period 1871-2 with D. D. Home, the principal accounts being those in Crookes's *Researches* and in his paper in our *Proceedings* (Vol. VI, 1889-90, pp. 98-127). Neither of these is at all comprehensive. We shall probably never know how much invaluable documentation has been accidentally or wilfully destroyed. Crookes, in a letter to Hereward Carrington dated July 18, 1907, refers to a 'mass of papers' apparently relating to seances. Mrs Hewat McKenzie records that Miss Scatcherd, a friend of Crookes towards the end of his life, reported that after his death his family decided to destroy everything connected with his psychical investigations.

We shall not attempt in the compass of a short paper to discuss the Home series, particularly since both of Crookes's published reports on this subject are readily available. The work with Florence Cook and Mrs Fay will be considered later. In the present section we shall review what we have been able to ascertain about the tests with Kate Fox and Williams, both of which present interesting features.

First, however, it will help to set the scene if we quote an account² given by Crookes in a letter to Dr (later Sir William) Huggins, F.R.S., of a joint sitting with the three mediums, D. D. Home, Herne and Williams. This document is of great importance in view of its date. It shows that, far from the initial period being one of quiet laboratory experiments with Home and Kate Fox, Crookes believed as early as the spring of 1871 that he was witnessing violent, authentic phenomena in the presence of mediums of whom one, at least, was later very convincingly convicted of fraud.

¹ A.S. and E.M.S., *Henry Sidgwick: A Memoir*, Macmillan, London, 1906, p. 290.

² Fournier d'Albe, *The Life of Sir William Crookes*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1923, p. 191.

April 12, 1871.

My dear Mr. Huggins,

We had the most exciting and satisfactory meeting last night I have ever known, and I would have given anything for you and Dr. Ord to have been there. In the afternoon the celebrated D. D. Home came here. He stayed to dinner, and then I took him with us to Russell Square, knowing that he would be very welcome.

You know that it is universally agreed upon by spiritualists that the phenomena are better in darkness than in light, but Home always refuses to sit in the dark, as he says it is not so satisfactory to those present. On this occasion, however, we induced him to join our dark seance as the phenomena with Herne and Williams are not strong in the light. We were arranged round the table in such a way that each medium was held by a trustworthy person and the rule was *very rigidly* enforced that all hands were to be held during the darkness. This was so strictly carried out that when any of us wanted to use his handkerchief or get his chair, a light was struck. At first we had very rough manifestations, chairs knocked about, the table floated about 6 inches from the ground and then dashed down, loud and unpleasant noises bawling in our ears and altogether phenomena of a low class. After a time it was suggested that we should sing, and as the only thing known to all the company, we struck up 'For he's a jolly good fellow'. The chairs, table, and things on it kept up a sort of anvil accompaniment to this. After that D. D. Home gave us a solo — rather a sacred piece — and almost before a dozen words were uttered Mr. Herne was carried right up, floated across the table and dropped with a crash of pictures and ornaments at the other end of the room. My brother Walter, who was holding one hand, stuck to him as long as he could, but he says Herne was dragged out of his hand as he went across the table. Mrs. W. Crookes, who was at the other side of the corner, kept hold all the time.

This was repeated a second time, on Home's singing again. Both mediums this time being lifted up and placed on the table. Hands being held throughout.

This seemed to entirely alter the character of the manifestations. Home's singing appeared to drive away the low-class influences and institute his own good ones. After a minute or two I suggested that we should all sing again, and proposed the song first sung, 'For he's a jolly good fellow'. Immediately a very sweet voice, high over our heads quite out of reach of anyone present even had they been standing, and as clear as a bell, said, 'You should rather give praise to God.' After that we were in no mood for comic songs. We tried something sacred, and as we sung we heard other voices joining in over our heads.

Then the accordion was lifted up from the table (all holding hands) and it floated about the room, sometimes going far away outside the circle and then coming gently on to some of our heads and hovering

within an inch or two of our faces, and all the time playing one of the most exquisite sacred pieces I have ever heard, and being accompanied by a very fine male voice. The rapidity of the movement of this instrument was most astonishing. It really seemed to be in two places at once. It came and played on my hand. I had not time to utter the words 'It's on my hand', when a person at the other end of the table, 9 feet off called out the same thing. Frequently this happened, and as it was playing all the time we could tell how rapidly it moved by the direction of the sound.

Then voices came and addressed us. Not rough and frightful ones like those Herne brings, but very sweet ones, whispering close into our ears in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of the mediums tricking us. One especially kept hovering about some of the company away from the mediums, and it whispered close into my wife's ear and then went over her head to the other ear, still speaking. I was served the same twice. The little hand bell was then lifted up and rising about the table, about 18 inches above it. Three persons said they saw it moving, by a luminous cloud above it, and Home said he saw a hand holding it. After that lights appeared darting about with great rapidity and leaving a tail for a fraction of a second. I saw these distinctly, as did everyone else, but on many occasions when lights appeared on persons' heads, only about half the company saw them. My eyes appeared amongst the least sensitive to these lights, but what I did see was unmistakable.

Altogether we counted about seven distinct voices.

As the evening got on the power increased, and hands came amongst us. Serjt. Cox had a book taken from his pocket, and whilst it was being removed he liberated one of his hands (joining the hands of those on each side of him and clasping the two with his other hand, so as not to leave any person's hand free) and he caught the fingers in the act of removing his book. It was *only a hand*, there being no arm or body attached to it, and it eluded his grasp and carried the book right across the table, where it was gently laid on my wife's hand. Then hands came to nearly all of us, faces were stroked and our hands patted and on some occasions the fingers lingered long enough to admit of being felt. On several occasions I made rapid darts in front, trying to catch the arm when the fingers were touching near me, but not once did I touch anything. Things were then carried about the table from one to another. Serjt. Cox's gloves were shaken in all our faces. Home's handkerchief was gently laid on our heads, shoulders, and hands, and then gently removed and carried elsewhere.

All this time we had notes on the accordion and voices talking. On two or three occasions there was more work of this sort going on than could have been accomplished by the three mediums present, *even had they been quite free* and trying to deceive us. Thus we had two voices, the accordion moving and playing, the bell ringing, the handkerchief moving, and fingers touching us — all in different parts

of the table, whilst the mediums were conversing quietly in their chairs in their own natural voices.

I feel it is impossible to describe to you all the striking things that took place, or to convey the intense feeling of genuineness and reality which they caused in our minds, but I want you to come and attend at another seance which is appointed for next Tuesday week, the 25th inst., at Russell Square, when Home has promised to come, and we are going to try and get the same party and if possible the same conditions. You must, however, prepare for the chance of a failure. Home was in wonderful power last night, but he is the most uncertain of mediums, and it is quite as likely that the next time absolutely nothing will take place. Still the combination of the three mediums ought to be battery power enough.

I won't say Excuse this long letter, for I think you will not mind the trouble of reading it; neither will I say keep it strictly private. At the same time please be careful to whom you show it, for I neither wish to be shut in a lunatic asylum, nor to be turned out of scientific society. I am writing this, to copy, for the sake of recording my own impressions when fresh on my mind; but Serjt. Cox has undertaken to draw up a full report of the meeting which we shall all go over, correct, and sign.

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

W. Huggins, Esq., F.R.S.

WILLIAM CROOKES.

As already remarked, the five main series of sittings were held in Crookes's home. The best description we have of Crookes's seance room is to be found in an account by W. Stainton Moses, in one of his note-books (preserved at the College of Psychic Science), of a sitting at which Moses himself acted as medium. This is interesting in itself and worth reproducing.

Monday, Dec. 2nd, [1872]. Seance at Mr. W. Crookes' F.R.S. Present Mr. and Mrs. W. Crookes. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Crookes. Serjt. Cox. Mrs. W. Crookes' mother and myself.

We sat in a room (in which we had dined) specially built by Mr. Crookes and furnished by him. The room is solidly based on concrete, so as to guard against any possibility of vibration. The windows are fitted with iron shutters on the outside so as to completely exclude light in a daylight seance. The table was a massive one which one could not creak or lift in any way. It is, I think, quite a[s] solid, if not more so, as Herne and Williams'.

The phenomena commenced with creakings and raps upon my chair. Mr. C. was astonished at these, which he said, had never been observed in the case of any other medium. The table creaked and was uneasy, and now and again a dull knock was heard in it. By and by Imperator's thud was heard, and these knocks increased in violence until they became very strong, and the table began to live

and move. The movements of the table continued until my chair (which had been placed with its back to the south-west) was moved so that I occupied my place with back to the North, as I usually sit. The movement of the table was very remarkable. The very heavy mass moved with a sort of ponderous sliding motion, and once, rose and vibrated heavily in the air. The whole room shook, in spite of its solid foundation and vibrated throughout, the pictures shook, and the chairs on which we sat oscillated strongly. These manifestations, I was told, were frequent with Mr. Home. Paper and pencil being on the table, I wrote several messages in trance. Questions were answered, and especially with reference to the movement of sitters who were finally placed thus: [here is inserted a diagram showing the arrangement of the sitters]. Messages were given expressive of welcome to the circle, and of desire to produce phenomena. Physical phenomena, it was said, were difficult to be got thro' me on that occasion. The knocks of Imperator became very loud and continuous.

Mr. Crookes showed us some remarkable spirit-photographs which had been sent him by Baron Kirkup from Florence.¹

The phenomenon on the whole most noticeable was the vibration of the room, and movement of the heavy table.

According to Crookes, in a letter to a 'Madame B.' of St Petersburg (see p. 129), the sittings with Kate Fox lasted over six months and took place once or twice a week in Crookes's own house. No adequate account in Crookes's own words has survived, though in his *Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena Called Spiritual*, January 1874 (reproduced in the *Researches*), he comments on certain phenomena obtained with this medium (pp. 87, 95 and 96 of *Researches*). These included raps which, according to his statement, went far beyond what could be obtained by the cracking of joints; direct writing (i.e. writing not produced by any person present); apports; etc. The best surviving account of Crookes's Kate Fox sittings is given by the distinguished anthropologist Sir Francis Galton, in a series of letters to Charles Darwin.² We are indebted to Dr E. J. Dingwall for making us aware of this material. These letters give a very favourable picture, from a far from credulous witness, of Crookes's method of working at this time.

¹ Baron Kirkup later satisfied himself that the photographs were fraudulent (see *The Spiritualist*, December 5, 1873, p. 440).

² Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1924, pp. 63-6. Of Galton's published writings, his important paper on *Mental Imagery* (reprinted in his book *Enquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, Macmillan, London, 1883) comes closest to the field of psychical research.

March 28, '72.

My dear Darwin,

* * *

Now about Mr. Crookes, I have been twice at his house in seance with Miss F. who puts her powers as a friend entirely at his disposal, and once at a noisy but curious seance at Serjeant Cox's. I can only say, as yet, that I am utterly confounded with the results, and am very disinclined to discredit them. Crookes is working deliberately and well. There is not the slightest excitement during the sittings, but they are conducted in a chatty easy way; and though a large part of what occurs might be done, *if the medium were free*, yet I don't see how it can be done when they are held hand and foot as is the case. I shall go on with the matter as far as I can, but I see it is no use to try to enquire thoroughly unless you have (as Crookes says) complete possession of a first class medium. The whole rubbish of spiritualism seems to me to stand and fall together. All orders are given by raps, — levitation, luminous appearances, hands, writings and the like are all part of one complete system.

The following is confidential at present. What will interest you very much, is that Crookes has needles (of some material not yet divulged) which he hangs *in vacuo* in little bulbs of glass. When the finger is *approached* the needle moves, sometimes (?) by attraction, sometimes by repulsion. It is not affected at all when the operator is jaded but it moves most rapidly when he is bright and warm and comfortable after dinner. Now different people have different power over the needle and Miss F. has extraordinary power. I moved it myself and saw Crookes move it, but I did not see Miss F. (*even* the warmth of the hand cannot radiate through glass). Crookes believes he has hold of quite a grand discovery and told me and showed me what I have described quite confidentially, but I asked him if I might say something about it to you and he gave permission.¹

I can't write at length to describe more particularly the extraordinary things of my last seance on Monday. I had hold in one of my hands of *both* the hands of Miss F's companion who also rested both her feet on my instep and Crookes had equally firm possession of Miss F. The other people present were his wife and her mother and all hands were joined. Yet paper went skimming in the dark about the room and after the word 'Listen' was rapped out the pencil was heard (in the complete darkness) to be writing at a furious rate under the table, between Crookes and his wife and when that was over and we were told (rapped) to light up, the paper was written over — all the side of a bit of *marked* note paper (marked for the occasion and therefore known to be blank when we began) with very respectable platitudes — rather above the level of Martin Tupper's compositions and signed 'Benjamin Franklin'! The absurdity on the one hand and

¹ It is not clear from this passage how far either Crookes or Galton originally associated Crookes' radiometer with mediumistic powers. [Note by Karl Pearson.]

the extraordinary character of the thing on the other, quite staggers me; wondering what I shall yet see and learn, I remain at present quite passive with my eyes and ears open.

Very sincerely yours,
FRANCIS GALTON.

April 19th, 1872.

My dear Darwin,

I have only had one seance since I wrote, but that was with Home in full gas-light. The playing of the accordion, held by *its base* by one hand under the table and again, away from the table and behind the chair was extraordinary. The playing was remarkably good and sweet. It played in Serjeant Cox's hands, but not in mine, although it shoved itself, or was shoved under the table, into them. There were other things nearly as extraordinary. What surprises me, is the perfect apparent openness of Miss F. and Home. They let you do whatever you like, within certain reasonable limits, their limits not interfering with adequate investigation. I really believe the truth of what they allege, that people who come as men of science are usually so disagreeable, opinionated and obstructive and have so little patience, that the seances rarely succeed with them. It is curious to observe the entire absence of excitement or tension about people at a seance. Familiarity has bred contempt of the strange things witnessed, and the people find it as pleasant a way of passing an idle evening, by sitting round a table and wondering what will turn up, as in any other way. Crookes, I am sure, so far as it is just for me to give an opinion, is thoroughly scientific in his procedure. I am convinced, the affair is no matter of vulgar legerdemain and believe it well worth going into, on the understanding that a *first rate medium* (and I hear there are only 3 such) puts himself at your disposal.

Now considering that the evenings involve no strain, but are a *repose*, like the smallest of occasional gossip; considering that there is much possibility of the affair being in many strange respects true, considering that Home will, bona fide, put himself at our disposal for a sufficient time (I assume this from Crookes' letter and believe it, because it would be bad for Home's reputation, if after offering he drew back; but of course this must be made clear); considering, I say, all these things will you go in for it, and allow me to join? Home is a restless man as regards his movements, and could be induced to go to and fro. I am sure I could — if I could *ensure a dozen seances*, at which only our two selves and Home were together. (Others might be in the room, if you liked, but, I would say, not present within reach.)

It is impossible, I see, to prearrange experiments. One must take what comes, and seize upon momentary means of checking results. Home *encourages* going under the table and peering everywhere (I did so and held his feet while the table moved), so I am sure you need not feel like a spectator in the boxes while a conjuror is performing on the stage. He and Miss F. just want civil treatment and a show of

interest. Of course while one is civil and obliging, it is perfectly easy to be wary. Pray tell me what you think of the proposal in Crookes' letter.

Very sincerely yours,
F. GALTON.

May 26th, '72.

My dear Darwin,

.....
As regards spiritualism nothing new *that I have seen* since I wrote, for Home and Miss F. have been both absent. I wrote a letter of overtures to Home when I enclosed yours, but got no reply. I have kept up communication with Crookes, and am satisfied that he has the investigation thoroughly in hand, and delays publication on grounds of desiring a little more completeness of data. He is a most industrious taker of notes.

How very kind your letter was about Home. It grieved me much that you had to speak in such terms about your health.

Ever sincerely yours,
FRANCIS GALTON.

June 7, 1872.

My dear Darwin,

I did not reply yesterday about the Spiritualists as I expected that day and this to have heard from Mr. Home, and Crookes is out of Town. It will give me great pleasure to do what I can for X.Y. but I rather doubt whether I shall have power to do much. I can't myself get to these seances as often as I like — indeed I have had no opportunity for a long time past. The fact is, that first class mediums are very few in number and are always acting. Also that Crookes and others are working their very best at the subject and entertain a full belief that they will be able to establish something important and lastly what, I see, is a real difficulty with them, the introduction of a stranger always disturbs the seances. I say all this to excuse me in your eyes, if I don't fulfil your wishes as you would like; but I will do my best and write — whenever I have anything to say to X.Y. as you propose.

The person most likely to help would, I think, be Lord L.

I wonder if I have offended Home by my last letter to him — he has never replied and I heard incidentally there is to be an important seance this very night! Alas for me!

Ever yours sincerely,
FRANCIS GALTON.

The last letter to Darwin concerning Home was in November of 1872. In the concluding paragraph Galton writes:

Crookes wrote to me that Home's presence was very important, for the experiments were far more successful when he was the

medium, than when anyone else was, and he is now in Russia and will not return until May. So I will wait.

These accounts of Crookes's work with Kate Fox should be supplemented by the later experiences with her (in 1874) of the 3rd Lord Rayleigh, one of the greatest of the nineteenth-century mathematical physicists.¹ Again, tragically little contemporary documentation survives. The student can only be referred to Rayleigh's Presidential Address to the S.P.R. (*Proceedings, S.P.R.*, 30 1918-19, pp. 275-90) and to the biography of his father by the 4th Lord Rayleigh.² Lord Rayleigh failed to obtain phenomena as striking as those reported by Crookes and, indeed, his interest did not sustain him through very many trials, but he did find effects that puzzled him and, in his opinion, went beyond any plausible hypothesis of fraud.

There is a certain mystery about the Williams series. In *Notes of an Enquiry* . . . , published in January 1874, Crookes says, ' . . . other matters of scientific and practical interest demand my present attention; and inasmuch as I cannot afford the time requisite to follow the enquiry as it deserves, and as I am fully confident it will be studied by scientific men a few years hence, and as my opportunities are not now as good as they were some time ago, when Mr. D. D. Home was in good health and Miss Kate Fox (now Mrs. Jencken) was free from domestic and maternal occupations, I feel compelled to suspend further investigation for the present.' But in fact, over this period Crookes was having weekly sittings in his house with Williams. From the Stainton Moses notebooks and from a reference in Serjeant E. W. Cox's *Mechanism of Man* (see below), we can trace this series as extending from November 1873 through to February 1874 (if not beyond), and there is some indication that they may have started considerably earlier.

Stainton Moses's accounts of the sittings he attended will be published in forthcoming issues of *Light*. They follow a similar pattern to the report that we shall now quote by Serjeant Cox, except that in Cox's report³ the issue is most sharply defined, since only three people, the medium and the two investigators, were present.

February 4th, 1874. — Experimental sitting with Mr. Williams, Psychic, in the dining room at the residence of Mr. Crookes, F.R.S.

¹ Cf. also Stainton Moses' sittings with Kate Fox, *Stainton Moses and Contemporary Physical Mediums, Light*, Winter, 1963.

² Robert John Strutt, Fourth Baron Rayleigh, *Life of John William Strutt Third Baron Rayleigh*, E. Arnold, London, 1924, p. 65 et seq.

³ *The Mechanism of Man*, Vol. II.: *The Mechanism in Action*, by E. W. Cox, Longman, London, 1879, p. 444.

The Psychic came alone in a cab, wearing ordinary evening dress. Confederacy impossible, no person being present but Mr. Crookes and myself. Personal action by the Psychic impossible, for we sat on either side of him, Mr. Crookes holding one hand, his foot upon the Psychic's foot, and I doing the like on the other side. Both of us assert positively that our hold upon him was never relaxed for a moment during the presentation of the phenomena. In this position, precluding the possibility of confederacy mechanism, or use of hand or foot by the Psychic, or moving an inch from his seat, the following phenomena occurred.

An arm chair and a heavy oak dining-room chair were brought from the other side of the room, a distance of seven feet from us, and placed upon the table at which we were seated. A large china jug nearly two feet high, and weighty, was brought from the sideboard and placed before us. A heavy musical box was wound up, lifted from the table, and carried round the room, playing the whole time. A handbell was repeatedly taken from the table and rung violently at each corner of the room and up at the ceiling. Asked that it might be brought nearer to me, it was immediately brought from a distant corner of the room, then circled round my head for several minutes, ringing furiously, until I was almost deafened by the noise and begged that it would cease the din; a request refused for some time. My watch was taken from my pocket, wound up, and returned to me. Many lights, like small shooting stars, or tiny rockets, continually descended from the ceiling to the table, and ascended from the table to the ceiling. All the customary sounds and motions attended this experiment, with other phenomena similar to those already reported.

The value of this experiment consists, not so much in novelty of phenomena presented, for all of them have been repeatedly witnessed, but in the exceptional excellence of the conditions under which they appeared. Collusion, confederacy, mechanism, were impossible, nor could it have been conjuring, for no conjuror can perform any trick when his hands are held and in the absence of a confederate. Mr. Crookes and myself had in our manual grasp, and under our entire control the only human body in the room, and therefore we possessed the most absolute security that nothing that was done could have been done by that body. The door was locked and sealed. We were alone with him for an hour. Conclusive proof that it was not an illusion is supplied by this, that after the experiment had ended, the chairs and jug were upon the table and the furniture of the room displaced.

Besides the telekinetic effects and the lights described by Cox, we know from Moses's reports (to be published in *Light*) that Williams also produced his 'John King' materialization in Crookes's house, apparently under good control conditions. Although we have been unable to trace any direct statement by Crookes on this subject, one interesting piece of confirmatory evidence has survived. In a

postscript to a report¹ by Professor Butleroff describing sittings that he and A. N. Aksakoff (a prominent Russian *savant* and dedicated psychical researcher) had with Williams in London in the summer of 1875, Aksakoff reports:

I must add that Mr. Crookes himself confirmed that the apparition of John King had appeared in his own house, whilst Mrs. Crookes had her hand on the shoulder of Williams, asleep behind the curtain.

Williams, at this period, was about twenty-four years of age. Like Florence Cook he was accused of fraud, both before and after these sittings. While we cannot go into the matter in detail here, it may be said that the evidence against him was very strong, though some Spiritualists were found to defend him. On one occasion, it is claimed, his one-time partner Herne (who was caught out at least once in flagrant fraud) tried to incriminate him by 'planting' false evidence on him. It is interesting to find that D. D. Home, well known as the arch-critic of most other mediums, says of Williams: 'The well attested phenomena occurring in the presence of Mr. Williams, whom I have ever found to be an honest man and one who shrinks from no reasonable tests, all prove the reality of the phenomena.'²

An interesting parallel can be drawn between these sittings and those with Florence Cook. Of both, one is inclined to say that since the same pattern of phenomena was repeated time and time again over many sittings, since the conditions were wholly under Crookes's control, and since the effects reported were so unambiguous, Crookes was quite unlikely to have been deceived. We know that in June, 1874, Crookes publicly declared that Williams's mediumship was genuine (see p. 106). Thus it might fairly be argued that we are left with a choice between assuming the phenomena authentic or the chief experimenter implicated in the fraud. If we judge Williams' phenomena to be fraudulent and Crookes to be a confederate, what motive do we suppose him to have had in continuing to give public support to this medium? As regards the rather closely parallel case of Florence Cook, Trevor Hall, in *The Spiritualists*, draws the conclusion that Crookes was infatuated with Florence Cook and that his apparent interest in her mediumship was a cloak for concealing an 'affair' with her. This hypothesis would seem to break down in the case of Williams, for surely

¹ *Meine Erlebnisse in London und Brüssel*, Psychische Studien, Vol. 3, Leipzig, 1876, p. 73.

² This is from a document in Home's handwriting, in the S.P.R. D. D. Home Collection, which is evidently a first draft of a portion of his book *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*. It is undated, but must have been written in 1876 or late in 1875.

we are not to imagine that Crookes was seduced by Williams as well!

We have not been able to ascertain why and under what circumstances Crookes terminated this series of sittings with Williams. It could not have been that Williams ceased to produce phenomena since he continued his seance room activities right through to the present century. There is a very curious unpublished narrative contained in a letter to Sir Oliver Lodge, dated 29/11/28, from Arthur J. G. Fletcher of St Paul's Vicarage, Thornton Heath, Surrey, which is of interest both in connection with Williams' later career and as a further demonstration of the persistence of 'John King'. While uncorroborated, we have thought it worth reproducing since, in spite of the late date of the sitting, what Mr Fletcher claimed to have seen is typical in detail of many early descriptions of 'John King'. The letter reads:

I attended my first spiritualist seance about the year 1902. The medium was a man named Williams; the seance was held in a house belonging to a Miss Forbes. I went to tea with Miss Forbes, and after tea helped her to arrange the room for the seance. It was a very ordinary, but rather nice sitting room, and beyond putting the fire out, and arranging a sofa for the medium, no special preparation was made. Four other people came after tea — two men who came for special business reasons, wishing to consult with someone who had passed over — and the medium. Williams placed specially prepared slates on the table. We gathered round, lowered the lights, said a prayer, and very soon Williams asked to be guided to the sofa. The sofa was quite close to me, and soon, to my amazement, I saw a filmy iridescent kind of cloud coming from the medium in a kind of spiral column; this, quite quickly, seemed to shape itself until it assumed the full length figure of a man, with a long black beard, a very fine forehead, and noble appearance. Then I saw him move away from the medium holding some sort of lights in his hands. He came straight to our table and stood on the far side opposite to me. He greeted us all very kindly, and after a while told us that his name was John King. He gave us some details of his life on earth, which I do not remember very distinctly, except that I think he said that he lived in the reign of one of the Charles. I was studying him very closely, and I asked him if he would show me the lights he was holding in his hands, and which were sending a soft glow of light all over him. At my question, he came straight through the table just as though it was not there, and held his hands under my face for inspection. The lights were circular, about the size of a five shilling piece, only thicker in the middle than at the edges. They were Light, rather than light. They seemed to be very alive, but almost fluid. By means of them I could see right through his hands. He spoke to me very kindly, and I was conscious that he was a very real presence. . . .

4. THE EARLY CAREER OF FLORENCE COOK

When we consider the early mediumistic career of Florence Cook, we find ourselves confronted with an almost embarrassing profusion of material and the task of selection is by no means easy. There is on record an alarming jumble of testimony, some giving the impression of a serious attempt at a critical appraisal of the phenomena, but much having a discouragingly naïve approach. Some unfavourable judgments are recorded and we shall consider these later. It is worth remarking that an 'exposure' should be subjected to the same critical examination as favourable testimony. We are not wholly in sympathy with the attitude (often shown by critics such as Trevor Hall and Podmore) that publication of an exposure is sufficient in itself to establish its validity, any more than the enthusiastic testimony of faithful 'believers', such as Florence Marryat, is necessarily to be taken at its face value.

We are not so much intending to correct or amplify Trevor Hall's book, as to present some of the essential research material that one might well have expected to have found in it. However, since Florence Cook's character has come so much in question, it will be as well to clarify one minor point at the outset. This is, that Florence's early dismissal from her teaching post (mentioned on page 2 of *The Spiritualists*) was due not to moral short-comings but to embarrassing publicity connected with her mediumship. Her headmistress's letter of dismissal contains an interesting assessment of her character at that time (this letter is preserved in the Britten Memorial Library, Manchester).

Dear Mrs. Cook,

I feel so grieved at what I am going to write about that I can scarcely commence. I have thought each day of coming in to see you; but my heart is so full, I feel I might say more than I ought. I find a report is spread in Hackney that I am a spiritualist; because Florrie comes to my school, and my friends have told me that my school may be injured in consequence. I am so fond of Florrie and I have such a high opinion of her, that I am sorry to say to you that I am compelled to part with her as my teacher. She has always been so willing to do anything and everything for me, that I assure you it is no small trial, and I must express to you my deep sorrow that she is engaged so much in the way she is,* for she is fitted for something far higher and nobler. Trusting this will not offend you, for I shall ever take a deep interest in your children.

Believe me,

Yours truly,

ELIZA CLIFF.

P.S. Katie [Cook] was in the house this afternoon, but I was so harassed that I do not think I spoke to her.

200 Richmond Road, 5th Jan. 1872.

* as a medium — viz. — Chairs following, books thrown, . . . (?) and pencils flying, table rushing without contact during school hours etc.

[This note is in the handwriting of Mr Charles Blackburn, the wealthy Manchester businessman who financed much of the Spiritualist activity in the 1870's and '80's.]

There is no indication when Blackburn added his curious footnote.

Some of the facts concerning Florence's earliest mediumistic activities are to be found in the first chapter of *The Spiritualists*: portions of her own autobiographical account¹ are reproduced on pages 3 and 10 of that book. It is a curious point that, though she herself says that she was instructed by a 'Control' to sit with the mediums Herne and Williams (then in partnership), there is no published evidence of her presence at seances with both these mediums or, for that matter, with Williams alone (Hall's statements on this matter, on page 11, *The Spiritualists*, are in error), though from 1871 through to December 1873 she certainly did have joint sittings with Herne.

She also shared the rôle of medium with Mrs Bassett and with Mr and Mrs Holmes. Mrs Bassett, like Miss Showers (see section 9), was a 'private' medium, who sat without fee and often refused to accept expenses. Mr and Mrs Holmes were American mediums who, following their return to their own country, were to find themselves the centre of a widely-publicized exposure. However, since the evidence consisted of the confession of a self-styled assistant of dubious morals, the case can hardly be said to be a proven one.²

The case of Herne raises the problem of fraud in its clearest form. As early as June 1872, W. H. Harrison (editor of *The Spiritualist*) discovered that Herne had connived in the production of fraudulent spirit photographs, and he did not hesitate to give publicity to this in *The Spiritualist* (June 5, 1872, p. 47). His comment is interesting. He says:

I told Mr. Williams of the photographic trick of his partner, and that I should cease to attend their *seances* for the future.

and then, after defending the general accuracy of his previous accounts of these mediums' seances, he adds:

¹ *The Spiritualist*, May 15, 1872, p. 36.

² See H. S. Olcott's *People from the Other World*, American Publishing Co., Hartford, Conn., 1875, pp. 425-78.

At the same time, seeing that there has been trickery at work in another case, there is no security that trickery may not have been at the root of some of the phenomena which I at the time believed to form the incipient stages of a genuine new manifestation already common in America, so described them minutely for scientific purposes. Therefore, all of them which could have been artificially produced ought now to be regarded as 'doubtful'. In future, it may be necessary to report *seances* in a fragmentary, incomplete way, selecting chiefly those portions which occur under test conditions.

This is close to the attitude to which the investigators of Eusapia Palladino were driven.¹ Crookes's point of view is made quite clear in a letter from E. T. Bennett, Assistant Secretary, S.P.R., to Sir Oliver Lodge (preserved by the Lodge family) dated November 2, 1895, describing a recent S.P.R. Council meeting. He writes:

There was considerable discussion about Eusapia. Mr Myers described the extent to which 'imposition' was *facilitated* after the earlier Cambridge expts., and which he thought would be admitted as justifiable. Mr Crookes said that among 100 or more 'mediums' he had had to do with — with hardly any exceptions — all more or less at times resorted to 'trickery'. But he ridiculed the idea of doubt being thus thrown on phenomena well observed and attested under different conditions.

To return to Herne: in December 1875 he was certainly caught impersonating 'John King' in a flagrantly fraudulent way.² This being so, what are we to make of the joint Florence Cook-Herne sittings, of which three are recorded, one at considerable length, in *The Spiritualist* for May 15, 1872? The phenomena seem crude but no more so than much described by Crookes, Barrett, A. R. Wallace and others. Little occurred that, one feels, could not readily have been produced by fraud, and it is a feature of these early sittings that the mediums were under no sort of restraint. It certainly seems rash in the extreme to have given these two young people (Herne was 22 and Florence 16) such an unlimited opportunity for playing practical jokes on their unsuspecting elders.

It is worth quoting an extract from Harrison's account³ of the Florence-Herne seance referred to by Trevor Hall on page 11 of his book. This was held in Hackney on April 21, 1872. The mediums were in a darkened room, separated by a curtain from

¹ Compare also Father Herbert Thurston's comment on the Spiritualistic scene at that time, quoted on p. 32.

² *The Spiritualist*, December 31, 1875, p. 323. See also D. D. Home's *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, Virtue & Co., London, 1877, p. 336.

³ *The Spiritualist*, May 15, 1872, p. 34.

the passage outside, in which were the sitters. Harrison says:

At Mr. Cook's home *seances* Katie King is in the habit of calling him 'Cookey! Cookey!', which he does not exactly like, as he says that it is not a respectful way of addressing a gentleman in his own house, even though the speaker be a disembodied spirit. Shortly after the hands disappeared, a full length robed figure rushed out of the room, seized him by the shoulders, shook him vigorously all the time, saying, 'Oh, Cookey! Cookey!' in the well-known voice of Katie King. If ever a man looked frightened, it was Mr. Cook on that occasion. Katie was covered with drapery, head and all, so that her face was not seen; but while this and other manifestations were given, the mediums inside the room joined in conversation with the spectators outside, making their comments on what was taking place all through the seance, so that it was clear to the observers that they never quitted their seats.

Next John King came out, draped all over; his voice was strong and powerful; he shook everybody present by the hand, and pressed several on the head and shoulders, to show the strong muscular power in his hands and arms. All the time no footsteps were heard. He next led or pushed all the observers in turn to one end of the passage, leaving the other end, which led to the stairs, clear; he lifted up little Donald Cook, and carried him bodily a yard or two along the passage, after which he and Katie announced their intention of going upstairs. Two dark shadows, with no well defined outline, were seen by all present going very rapidly up the stairs. A few seconds afterwards the passage was in pitch darkness, the light being obstructed above by some means unknown to the observers. A few attempts were then made to show spirit faces by phosphorescent lights, but failed, probably in consequences of the exhaustion of Mr. Herne at the *seance* of the preceding night. There was then an interval of a quarter of an hour. Directly the mediums sat again, Miss Cook cried out, 'There is a man here'. The door of the room then closed with a bang. A loud snapping noise was heard, and a brilliant light streamed through the cracks of the door. At the same time Miss Cook was heard screaming and running about the room. Soon the door was opened, and she came out trembling violently with excitement.

This reads very like an account of a series of tricks by these two young mediums. However, to be quite fair, one cannot overlook Harrison's positive statement that while 'Katie' and 'John King' were out in the passage, the mediums made it clear, by continued conversation with the sitters, that they had not left their seats.¹

¹ It will be noticed that Trevor Hall's suggestion that the two 'shadows' went upstairs and stayed there for a quarter of an hour while the sitters sat quietly below in the dark, is not in accord with Harrison's own account. We draw attention to this minor error because it appears that sinister significance, as regards Florence's morals, has been attached to this episode!

Of the early 'exposures' of Florence by Dr J. E. Purdon (June 1872), Mr H. Cholmondeley-Pennell (Jan. 1873), and Lord Arthur Russell (Feb. 1873), the second is the only one likely to have greatly disturbed contemporary Spiritualist opinion. As regards the Russell exposures, the question turned on the discovery that the string used to tie Florence was found, after the sitting, to be 'sewn together' at one point with white thread. The suggestion that 'this had probably been done in the shop where the string had been bought', Lord Russell found unconvincing. One does, in fact, find joins even in modern balls of string, and it would help greatly to clarify this matter if we could have expert testimony to show whether or not the Victorian string makers were accustomed to use thread for this purpose. However, although Florence herself seems to have been shaken by this episode (see, for example, the account of a seance with Stainton Moses, quoted below), the evidence for fraud would have been sufficiently isolated not to have greatly disturbed the faithful, particularly since there were plenty of other sitters to testify that on other occasions the strings or tapes remained quite sound.¹

Incidentally, we may note that, far from the Spiritualist press being in a conspiracy to suppress adverse reports, Harrison actually requested from Lord Russell an account of his discovery, of the nature of which he was aware in advance.²

Cholmondeley-Pennell's complaint must be regarded as more damaging to Florence. He had noticed that a check-string, attached to Florence and then brought out from the cabinet into the seance room, was withdrawn sufficiently to allow the medium access to the aperture at which 'spirit faces' appeared. He subsequently declared himself satisfied, but only on the strength of the later reports by Crookes.

The Purdon 'exposure' was a very different matter, and ended as a triumph for Florence. The initial sittings took place in Sandown, Isle of Wight, during visits that Florence paid to Dr and Mrs Purdon, whom she described to Charles Blackburn as 'very kind good-natured people'. Dr Purdon's first letter to *The Spiritualist*³ on this subject is described as being sent at Florence's request: she apparently believed in publicly facing up to the snags entailed in this kind of mediumship.

¹ See, for example, Sexton's account in *The Medium and Daybreak* Jan. 2, 1874, p. 13. He claimed to have retained the tapes, still bearing his own seal and showing no sign of having been tampered with. So also did Dr Purdon (*Light*, May 10, 1902, p. 223).

² It seems a little ungenerous for Trevor Hall to describe Russell's letter as one 'which would clearly have been hard to suppress'.

³ *The Spiritualist*, June 15, 1872, p. 46. Subsequent letters from Purdon are on pp. 55 and 70.

Dr Purdon's first letter reads:

Sir,

At Miss Cook's request, who has been staying at my house for some time past, I write to say that on recent occasions a face has appeared at the window of the cabinet within which Miss Cook sits as a medium for the manifestation. Others, with myself, have seen this face, apparently of flesh and blood, and the likeness to Miss Cook is so startling that tests have been asked for and acceded to. (This is a correction to my former statements, the face having been seen under much more favourable conditions of light, etc.)

At noon, on the 5th June, my brother took a positive photograph of the face as it appeared at the cabinet window, the medium at the beginning of the sitting having been locked to the floor by means of straps and rings attached to a canvas jacket, in which she had been laced and sealed.

This experiment, which would have been conclusive, has been rendered utterly worthless, as a verification, by the fact that on the doors of the cabinet being opened, the medium was found free, the seals having been broken, and the whipcord with which the jacket was laced cut in several places. On examination, the leather straps through which the medium was fastened to the floor, were found to bear the marks of a cutting instrument; the canvas of the jacket also showed jagged cuts in the neighbourhood of the straps. As we have been interrupted on more than one occasion by what professes to be an evil spirit, we have determined to guard against such tricks as the above by substituting for the jacket iron chains fastened by chubb locks.

Sandown, 10th June, 1872.

JOHN E. PURDON, M.B.

Dr Purdon enclosed with this letter a note to Harrison from Florence. Harrison quotes the following extract:

Dr. Purdon sends you a short account of what has taken place. The results are far from satisfactory. We have been greatly troubled by a bad spirit, calling himself the devil; he says that he will try and undo all the good my Katie does. We got on well at first on Wednesday, and then, at the very last, he dragged me out of the jacket, how, no one knows. The whipcord was certainly cut, but *I had no knife about me*, nor could one have been concealed in the cabinet. We are now trying steel chains and locks. I hope it will succeed. I am terribly annoyed, but I suppose it cannot be helped. I never had bad spirits before this. We waited to see if we could get anything good before we sent to you.

A month later, Purdon sent to Harrison the following letter:

Sir,

With reference to Miss Cook's mediumship, I find that I cannot command the manifestations, and that I must be content to take what

I can get. That Miss Cook has never attempted to impose upon me in any way is the conclusion I have arrived at after mature study and comparison of all the evidence, external and internal, connected with this difficult case. She is a wonderful medium, and, what is better, is one who is not afraid to show the dark side any more than the light. Sandown, I.O.W. 11th July, 1872. JOHN E. PURDON, M.B.

Purdon had not long to wait for complete conviction. In September he wrote the last letter of this series.

Sir,

I wish to state, with reference to Miss Cook's mediumistic powers, that on a recent occasion I have had an opportunity of being a witness to some manifestations of a nature so reliable as to force any man, placed under circumstances similar to mine, to drop all hair-splitting and nonsense, and set himself down to seek for truth, if the discovering of truth, and that alone, were the subject of his investigation. On the occasion alluded to, I was seated in the room with Miss Cook, alone; and I found that after a few minutes she was tied in a way that put effort and assistance on her part out of the question. On the same evening she was lifted on the table several times, having been previously tied firmly to her chair. Hands and faces were also felt and seen. One face was perfectly black. I can confidently direct the attention of investigators to the advantage to be derived from a sitting with this young lady. Sandown, Isle of Wight, September 11th, 1872.

J. E. PURDON, M.B.

It is disappointing that Purdon gives such scanty detail of the events at a sitting which so impressed him.

Dr Purdon went on to have many sittings with Florence, as well as with her sisters Kate and Edith. He gives an account of some of his experiences in *Light* for May 10, 1902, p. 223, in the course of which he writes:

On one occasion in my quarters at the Sandown Hospital, Isle of Wight, I held the feet of Miss Florence Cook firmly against the floor, and can certify that there was no lifting of the heels, either with or without her boots, and that there was such an elongation that my brother-in-law, the late assistant-surgeon, Mark A. Kilroy, whose hands were on her shoulders, cried out, 'She is dragging me up to the ceiling'. As he was over five feet nine inches in height, there could have been no posturing that would account for his experience. Further, I most distinctly remember Miss Cook coming back with a jerk to her normal stature. My wife, who was present and heard her brother make the above remark, fully endorses my statement.

There is a long and interesting report by Dr Purdon, published in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* for December 2, 1885 (pp. 1

and 8), of experiments carried out by him with the three Cook sisters, Florence, Kate and Edith, over a period extending into 1883. He says:

Several years ago, when experimenting with Miss Florence Cook, at that time a celebrated London medium for all kinds of spiritualistic manifestations, both physical and mental... the writer discovered certain visual anomalies in her case, which increased experience and multiplied experiments with other members of her family, also mediums, incontestably proved to be related to the *modus operandi* of the expressions of the potential energy of the living body in that novel and extra-muscular mode exhibited in the seance room and on occasions outside of it.

The most important outcome of these experiments was the establishment on inductive ground of the conclusion that such changes took place within the brain and its circulatory machinery, during a seance attended with satisfactory manifestations, as led to the most profound disturbance of vision, both as regards color and form, the former being direct results of disturbance of cerebral functions, while the latter were indirect and appeared to result from disarrangement of the adjustment and correlation of the separate muscles of the eyeball, including the internal muscles of the accommodating apparatus.

Purdon's report is quite detailed, and requires evaluation by a physiologist with the appropriate specialist knowledge. We hope to arrange this in due course.

We select from the many accounts of sittings in what might be called the pre-Volckman period of Florence's mediumship, one from the notebooks of Stainton Moses, partly for its unusual character, and partly because, if Florence's phenomena were completely spurious, this narrative does at least make it clear that, besides the great skill in fraud indicated by other reports, she must also have been an actress of some ability.

Monday, 17th Feb. 1873. A Seance at Mr. Henry Cooks's. Present Dr. and Mrs. Speer, Mr. Blackburn, Mr. Traill Taylor, Mr. W. H. Harrison, and myself.

The medium was elaborately tied, sealed, etc. No manifestations occurred. Soon after the medium entered the Cabinet a scratching was heard, after which all became quiet. We sang, and waited, but all in vain. After a considerable interval had elapsed I suggested that the door of the cabinet be opened. I had been conscious of an evil influence in the room, and I believed that this was stopping the manifestations. When the door was opened the Medium was found to be in a deep trance from which it was impossible to awaken her. We tried in vain all means. Dr. Speer took her round the garden but she did not revive, and came up into the room half dazed, with a sad wan look which was very painful. I now felt convinced that she was

under evil influence, and proposed a dark seance to get rid of the possession. She said that a fearful head and hand had appeared in the cabinet, and the hand had been put over the mouth and had entranced her. She shuddered violently at the recollection, and seemed very much disturbed. She welcomed my suggestion readily and asked me to place the sitters, sitting next to her myself. I did so, and with a prayer, and the sign of the cross we sat down in the dark. The evil influence was immediately behind Miss Cook's chair. I could trace it in the form of a livid grey-looking mass crowned by a repulsive shadowy head. Turning to it and fixing my gaze on it I said mentally, with all the force of will that I could 'In the Name of the Ever Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and by virtue of the Ministry of the Holy Angels of the Supreme who encircle me, depart! Begone!'

Immediately the damp chilling influence vanished, the atmosphere visibly lightened, and round about me came a luminous cloud apparent to all, whilst over my head was a crown of light. I saw very distinctly forms of light standing near me, whilst Imperator stood behind me. I have not seen spirits so clearly for a long time past. I could see the greenish-grey, livid appearance of the fiend, and the radiant golden light which heralded the appearance of Imperator and the Band. (I had earnestly desired Imperator's presence: and had summoned him by a wish as he had told me).

He entranced me and spoke very earnestly, saying that he had come on a message of mercy and of warning. The Spirit who had been driven away was he said a Spirit of great power and very malignant. Possession by him would have been a most serious thing for the medium. He warned the Circle of the danger of meddling with things too sacred for mere curiosity, except in a spirit of truth-seeking and reverence.

After he concluded, Katie came and entranced Miss Cook, and thanked me very earnestly for delivering her Medium from that evil Spirit who, she said, might have caused her death. She had only turned away for a minute, and the fiend had got in.

It was altogether a very remarkable scene: and gave one a fearful notion of the danger of curious meddling with the Spirits, tho' at the same time a very cheering proof of the power of good over evil.

The medium had been upset by an unsatisfactory seance with Lord Arthur Russell and had also been greatly vexed by some reports spread about her by Mrs. Guppy. She was unfit to sit, and never ought to have gone into the cabinet. The more I see of the subject the more sure I am that it requires to be treated with the greatest care and circumspection. 'Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.'

It is interesting to find the theme of the 'evil spirit', the 'Devil' of Sandown, recurring. We shall find that this persists throughout Florence's career (see pp. 68 and 85).

The story of the Volckman exposure, of December 9, 1873, as

told by many authors (see, e.g., *The Spiritualists*, pp. 27-32), is, briefly, that a respectable Spiritualist and investigator, one William Volckman, a former member of the London Dielectical Society Committee, contrived with great difficulty (and with the eventual help of a present of jewellery) to gain access to a Hackney sitting. After having for forty minutes carefully observed the 'spirit', he came to the conclusion that she was indeed Florence and, ultimately, he 'grasped the spirit'. In the subsequent struggle, involving Messrs Tapp, Luxmoore and Corner (the last of whom later married Florence), Mr Volckman lost part of his beard, and the 'spirit' was extracted from Volckman's grasp and thrown back into the cabinet. After an interval, Florence was found in a distressed condition, but still tied with the same tape with which she had been originally bound. Volckman states that 'no third parties had any knowledge of my invitation to, or presence at, the seance in question'.

It is suggested by Trevor Hall that Blackburn, who was present was antagonised by this exposure and that Florence, being 'almost desperate', threw herself on Crookes's mercy, Crookes then becoming embroiled with Florrie's mediumship for the first time.

We shall show that almost all the statements and conjectures in the last two paragraphs are wrong, that the motives were not what they seemed, that the principal witness was in at least one respect lying, and that the reactions of those concerned were unlikely to have been as stated. We shall discuss later how this affects our view of the exposure itself.

The background to these events was the jealous hatred directed by the medium Mrs Guppy against certain of the more newly arrived mediums who threatened to outstrip her in popularity. This is one of those facts of the psychic scene which were apparently well known to contemporary Spiritualists, but for which it is not now easy to find evidence, just as it is surprisingly hard to find recorded impressions of the personalities of the various protagonists. Apart from eulogies by Miss Georgina Houghton (*Evenings at Home in Spiritual Seance*, 2nd Series, E. W. Allen, London, 1882), the only personal comment on Mrs Guppy we have seen appears in a letter from Lord Rayleigh to Sidgwick, dated June 7, 1874 (reproduced in the biography by his son). He says:

Mrs. Guppy I don't think I could stand, even in the cause of science and philosophy!

We shall quote two unpublished documents from very different sources on what one might call the 'Guppy Plot'. The first is

extracted from a description of a seance in the Stainton Moses notebooks.¹

Thursday, 27th Feb. 1873. Seance at Mrs. Holmes'. Present 18, including Mr. Ashman, and James Clark (Mrs. Guppy's medium) and a Mr. Ellis of Devonshire Street, Queen Square.

The manifestations commenced very favourably, and were proceeding in the usual manner when we were startled by a light being struck by J. C. The instruments were floating and being played in the air, and I saw the guitar fall to the ground, from near the ceiling. Two other instruments were in the air, and I saw one of them fall. The other I did not see, but I looked at once to Mr. Holmes who was in his usual place, and the medium was tied as she had been at first, and under control by Rosie. Mr. Holmes immediately walked to J. C. who sat in the centre of the circle holding the match which he had struck and looking with a fixed gaze before him. He said 'I think that is satisfactory'. His face was the most unnatural one I ever saw — the face of a maniac, or of one under possession by an evil spirit. I do not think that he was responsible for his actions. Mr. Holmes told him to leave the room asking him 'Who told him to strike a match'. He said 'I told myself'. Mr. H. again told him to go, but afterwards at the suggestion of some person, locked the door, and refused to allow him to go. This brought me up, and I denounced J. C. as a person whom I had detected in cheating. I said publicly that he was a person whom I had proved to be unworthy of credence. . . .

J. C. is a dangerous and unscrupulous person, instigated, as I believe, by Mrs. Guppy to molest Mrs. Holmes. Mrs. G. is now engaged in an attempt to bedaub the character of Miss Cook and Mrs. Holmes. She is a jealous woman, and will stick at nothing. J. C. is her unscrupulous tool.

The second document is a remarkable letter from Nelson Holmes to D. D. Home, preserved in the S.P.R. *Home Collection*.

D. D. Home, Esq.

Dear Sir,

Our mutual friend, J. M. Roberts, Esq., of Burlington, N. J., incidentally mentioned that he had received a letter from you wherein you cite Mrs. Guppy as an enemy of ours and who instigated the persecution against us in London. The purpose of this letter is to post you more fully in relation to that matter.

It is seldom that an opportunity is afforded a medium to set himself right before the public, but having every reason to expect that you will do us justice, I take this method of introducing myself and giving

¹ *Stainton Moses and Contemporary Physical Mediums, Light*, Autumn 1963, p. 138.

you the details of what was known as the 'Guppy Warfare on the Holmeses' in London in 1872-1873.

In January 1873, Mrs. Guppy called at our residence, 16 Old Quebec St., London, W. and endeavoured to enlist our co-operation in a plot whereby a certain Mr. Clark, Mr. Henderson, and one Vlockman (sic) were to be hired to attend a seance at Miss Cook's, and watching their opportunity, at a favourable moment, while the manifestations were in progress to throw vitrol (sic) in the face of the spirit, hoping thereby to destroy for ever the handsome features of Miss Florrie Cook, and thus at one fell stroke to effectually remove from further use a medium who, Mrs. Guppy claimed, had and was taking all her, Mrs. Guppy's, friends away from her and upon whose patronage Mrs. G. had long depended.

While reciting this horrible scheme to us, she seemed fairly possessed by a legion of fiends, and her rage at Miss Cook and 'her doll face', as she termed it, was fearful to behold. When I realised the full import of this loathing (sic) affair, I immediately ordered her from the house, and the next day wrote to Mr. Samuel Guppy, her husband, and gave him notice that his wife could never again enter our house.

The day following, the poor old man called and tried to reconcile the matter and with tears in his eyes earnestly pleaded that the affair should go no further. This I could not promise, as I felt it my sacred duty, let the consequences be what they might, to notify Miss Cook and her friends. This we, Mrs. H. and myself, did at Mr. Luxmoore's immediately following the interview with Mr. Guppy.

To many, whom we thought it our duty to inform, the story seemed to (sic) horrible for belief, and a general desire prevailed on all sides to hush the matter up.

From Miss Cook, Mrs. Guppy now turned her rage against us, and soon after sent a party headed by Henderson, the photographer, to tear down our cabinet and otherwise break up our seances in London, in which scheme, however, they were signally foiled.

The foregoing will suffice to prove to your mind the cause of the 'Guppy Warfare on the Holmeses'. If necessary, I can give you the details of the infamous transactions of Mrs. Guppy with Miss Emily Berry, 1 Hyde Park Place, also why Mrs. Guppy used her pretended mediumship for base purposes, and gave seances solely for assignation meetings to better enable certain disreputable parties to further carry out their lewd propensities.

* * *

Hoping your health may improve and many days yet added to your lot,

I am most

Sincerely yours

NELSON HOLMES.

Mrs Guppy's attentions also extended to Mrs Bassett who, as we have seen (p. 49), was an associate of Florence Cook. The agent

here was again James Clark. A note in *The Spiritualist* for July 31 1874, p. 60, referring to this episode, comments:

James Clark is the same youth who left Mr. Guppy's house to strike lights at the Holmes's *Seance*; he returned the same evening, and delivered his report to Mrs. Guppy. . . . Mr. Volckman has been a guest at several of Mrs. Guppy's *seances* since the outrage at Mr. Cook's as well as before.

This, incidentally, is the same Volckman who, after Mr Guppy's decease, was to marry Mrs Guppy.

Taking everything together, it seems certain that the sitters were justified in concluding,¹ from the odd behaviour they noticed, that Volckman's action was planned before the sitting, in spite of his denial. His statement that nobody knew before-hand of his intentions must be a lie. It is important to consider how this information affects our estimate of the reactions of Florence's circle, particularly of Blackburn, to the Volckman episode. A man in Blackburn's position was sure to have been informed of the 'Guppy plot' and, in fact, one undated fragment torn from a letter by Florence to Blackburn, now preserved in the Britten Memorial Library, reads:

Mrs. Guppy will be surprised when she sees the papers. It will stop her nonsense. I believe she is saying all sorts of horrid things about me.

Blackburn would thus have known what was at the back of Volckman's action, and we can now wonder whether it is so 'reasonable to assume' (as Trevor Hall does) 'that Florence's allowance was suddenly placed in serious jeopardy in December 1873'. Indeed we hardly need to wonder, because Blackburn made it publicly clear that he was not withdrawing his support. Harrison remarks (*The Spiritualist*, Feb. 6, 1874): 'But there is no reason why anybody should submit to such annoyances as those which have sprung up lately, and yesterday we received a letter from Mr. Blackburn, asking us to publish that he and Mr. Luxmoore have resolved to shut out the public from the *seances* altogether, and to carry them on in strict privacy for the benefit of a few scientific men.'

We have to consider whether any of the foregoing information should affect our view of the validity of the exposure. It might be argued that, whatever the *motives* of Volckman, his *action* resulted in Florence being caught masquerading as a spirit. But it has to be borne in mind that the problem to be assessed is entirely one of

¹ *The Spiritualist*, Feb. 6, 1874, p. 71.

conflicting testimony. On the one hand we have a body of sitters, including the Earl of Caithness, Lady Caithness, Charles Blackburn and eight others, all testifying that five minutes after the seizure of 'Katie', Florence was found 'in black dress and boots, with the tape tightly round her waist as at the beginning of the *seance*, the knot sealed as at first with the signet ring of the Earl of Caithness, and sewn underneath the seal with thread, as it had been sewn before the *seance* by Mr. Luxmoore'.¹ On the other hand we have Volckman's assurance that it was indeed Florence whom he grasped. We shall see later that there may be some reason to doubt the integrity of three of the sitters present, namely Luxmoore, Dunphy and Tapp (see p. 118). If all our information regarding Volckman had been that he was, as Trevor Hall remarks, one of a group of people (a Committee of the Dialectical Society set up to investigate Spiritualism), described as 'persons of social position, of unimpeachable integrity, with no pecuniary object, having nothing to gain by deception, and *everything to lose by detection of imposture*' (the italics are Hall's),² we might well lean towards acceptance of Volckman's story. But in view of what we have been able to ascertain about Volckman, we are clearly left with no ground for preferring his word to that of the eleven other sitters.

We conclude this section by a brief mention of the Varley electrical test, the first account of which was published in *The Spiritualist* for March 20, 1874. This has been carefully analysed by Professor Broad and it is clear from his analysis that no simple substitution of a resistance for Florence's body can account for the set of galvanometer readings given by Varley. It has been suggested by Trevor Hall that Crookes helped Florence to deceive Varley in this test. Mr Salter remarks (*Journal S.P.R.*, September 1962, p. 377) that 'for Crookes to use his scientific knowledge to enable Florence to render nugatory a test to which a fellow scientist . . . attached importance implies a degree of moral obliquity which could only be imputed on very strong evidence'; with this we heartily agree. It should consequently be stressed (as Professor Broad mentions in passing) that, contrary to Trevor Hall's statement, the words used by Varley concerning the loan of his equipment to Crookes are such as to imply that this took

¹ It is a pity the sitters felt it necessary to wait five minutes before ascertaining that Florence was in her chair, dressed and securely fastened as at the beginning of the *seance*.

² Mr Hall has perhaps missed the point here. It would be odd indeed if the members of an investigating committee had 'everything to lose by detection of imposture'! The Dialectical Society's Committee used its own members as mediums, and in *that capacity* the remark clearly has application to them. On a subsequent occasion, as, for example, that of the Volckman exposure, the remark equally clearly has no relevance at all.

place *after*, rather than before the test with Florence. Thus, there is nothing to support the suggestion that Crookes had the opportunity beforehand to devise a technique for circumventing the electrical control.

We have two factual points to add. One is that if, in some way not now apparent, a method of fraud involving electrical skill was used, Crookes is by no means the only one of Florence's friends who could be nominated as a possible accomplice. Harrison, whom Blackburn appointed to be the first 'Manager' of Florence's sittings, had at one time been himself engaged in electrical work to the extent of assisting Varley in his researches on telegraphy (see *The Spiritualist*, July 20, 1877, p. 27). The other point involves a further minor correction to *The Spiritualists* (p. 51), namely that far from Crookes attempting subsequently to draw attention away from the Varley experiment, we shall find him emphasizing its importance as late as March 1875 (see his account of the test with Mrs Fay on p. 95).

Mr Trevor Hall has attached considerable importance to what he regards as the 'mystery' of the date of Florence Cook's birth (see *The Spiritualists*, pp. 1-3, and plate 1b). In May 1872, in an article written by Florence for *The Spiritualist*, she began: 'I am sixteen years of age.' Hall tells us that a search at Somerset House 'failed to reveal anything except that her birth was not registered in England between 1849 and 1858 inclusive'. He observes: 'first Florence's parents and then Florence herself have succeeded in enveloping the actual date of her birth in a fog of mystery that has so far proved impenetrable.' Some sinister inferences are drawn by Mr Hall. He goes to the trouble of reproducing her handwriting at this time, to show its 'maturity': he infers that Florence was lying about her age in 1872, that she may have been born *before* her parents' marriage, and that she 'may not have been Henry Cook's child at all. . . . We may never know when she was born, but we may reasonably assume that it was some time before she said'.

In view of the interest that Mr Hall has expressed in this matter, we are pleased to be able to report that we have a copy of Florence's birth certificate, obtained by a routine visit to Somerset House. It will perhaps not occasion much surprise that her birth date was June 3, 1856. She was not telling the precise truth in May 1872: she *exaggerated* her age by one month, a common failing in the very young. If the date given by Mr Hall for her parent's marriage is correct, she was born five months after the wedding: reprehensible, no doubt, but not, we would have thought, a matter of great moment as regards Florence's mediumship.

5. WILLIAM CROOKES AND FLORENCE COOK

In view of Crookes's wide and active interest in the mediumistic scene, it would be surprising indeed if he had attended none of Florence's sittings before December 1873. Some evidence in this connection is to be had from a register kept by Crookes of letters received by him. Part of this is quoted by Fournier d'Albe on pages 180-1 of *The Life of Sir William Crookes* (the letters themselves are lost). The relevant entries are:

F. Cook: [letters from]

1872, May 8, Seances.

Sept. 11, Seances for me.

Sept. 17, Invitation to Mrs. Crookes.

Sept. 20, Declines invitation. Further experiments.

Crookes's later statement, that he had 'only been admitted, as it were, at the eleventh hour',¹ evidently refers to his being allowed an experimental free hand, rather than to his mere presence at sittings as a visitor.²

The first detailed description we have of a Florence Cook sitting attended by Crookes is given in *The Spiritualist* for Dec. 19, 1873, p. 478 and is of value since it amplifies Crookes's own account in *Researches* (1st ed. p. 103). This is the sitting in which, so he claims, he heard 'sobbing, moaning' sounds from Florence in the cabinet while 'Katie' stood in the room.

Spirit Forms — Miss Cook has been very ill and nervous since the outrage printed in the last number of this journal, but last Tuesday night was well enough to give a *seance* to a large and influential company of friends, at the residence of Mr. J. C. Luxmoore, J.P., 16 Gloucester-square, Hyde-Park, W. Neither she nor her friends entered the dark room to be used as a cabinet before the *seance* began, and all the gentlemen present, including Mr. W. Crookes, F.R.S., searched it. There being a second door to the room, a short piece of thick wire was passed through the keyhole, after the door was locked, and pieces of thick metal soldered to the opposite ends of the wire, thus upsetting any theory that a person could get in with a duplicate key. The window was firmly secured in many ways. All the ladies of the party, including, among others, Mrs. Honywood, Mrs. Crookes and Mrs. Tappan, searched the medium in a bedroom before she entered the *seance* room, where she was bound and tied

¹ *Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 103.

² This is confirmed by a passage in a letter dated May 11, 1874, from Crookes to Blackburn (preserved in the Britten Memorial Library), in which Crookes says: 'I feel sure that had I been allowed to take a more active part in these seances twelve months ago we should have had such tests then'.

down as usual, and the knots sealed with the signet-ring of Mr. Crookes. Katie came out in flowing white robes and bare feet, in the usual way, and wherever the white robes came from, it is certain that they did not get into the seance room by any method known to any living mortal. The knots and seals were intact after Katie retired. A most extraordinary physical test was given to Mr. Crookes, which will first be published elsewhere; so we refrain, by request, from giving the particulars at present.

It must have been shortly after this that Charles Blackburn transferred the 'management' of the Florence Cook sittings from Luxmoore to Crookes. Blackburn's part in the matter is made clear by the following extract from *The Spiritualist* for Feb. 18, 1876, p. 83.

Mr. Blackburn has sent us the following letter in reference to Mr. Harrison's address at the testimonial meeting in the Cavendish Rooms:

Parkfield, Didsbury, Manchester.
7th Feb. 1876.

To the Editor of '*The Spiritualist*'.

Sir — I observe all you said at the presentation meeting. I wish you had made some little allusion to Florence Cook in it, for by my securing her services, and asking you to act as manager, then Mr. Luxmoore and then Mr. Crookes, I think she gave the newspaper a very great lift, and you would scarcely have been so advanced by several years. Therefore she is deserving of some notice amongst us as a supporter of a newspaper of elevated and spiritual character; of course now that she is married and is no more amongst us, we shall find others cropping up having similar power. . . .

Yours truly,
CHARLES BLACKBURN.

It is to be noted that, far from repudiating Florence at this date (as supposed by Trevor Hall), Blackburn took the trouble to commend her publicly.

Crookes's experiments with Florence Cook, as described in his own writings, have been discussed by many authors. They have been given a position of central importance in the history of psychical research, since it may well be asserted that full-form materialization has never before or since been witnessed by an investigator of scientific eminence under such favourable conditions. A very fair survey is to be found in Father Herbert Thurston's book *The Church and Spiritualism*.¹ After a careful analysis of the published accounts and of the objections of critics such as Frank Podmore, Father Thurston finds grave difficulties in accepting the theory of imposture by Florence during the long

¹ Milwaukee, 1933, Chapter X, 'Materializations and "Katie King"'.
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series of sittings in Crookes's house. He is, of course, assuming Crookes's reliability and competence. Trevor Hall, while not coming down on the side of either of the possible methods of fraud (impersonation of the spirit by the medium or impersonation by an accomplice), takes it for granted that fraud took place, and goes on to argue that Crookes could not have been deceived and that Crookes was consequently himself a confederate.

Examples of propositions by Trevor Hall that are readily shown to be invalid are: that an antithesis exists between Crookes's work with Florence Cook and with other mediums, the one being of a sensation-mongering nature and the other 'critical and scientific':¹ that Crookes's active interest in psychical research ceased with 'Katie King's' departure on May 21, 1874: that Blackburn's jealousy was aroused by Crookes's monopoly of Florence's sittings after the Volckman affair: and that prior knowledge of 'Katie's' departure was kept from Blackburn for some sinister reason.² But one very telling point remains, and has been developed by Hall with great effect. This depends on the circumstance that Kate Cook, Florence's sister, produced, over the period 1875-91, a series of manifestations similar to Florence's phenomena (including a full-form active materialization) which seem, to a large extent, to have been directed towards relieving Blackburn of a very large sum of money, and which it is, perhaps, hard to regard as other than fraudulent.

We shall discuss Kate Cook's reputed mediumship in the next section. Meanwhile, it is worth considering a little further to what extent this subsidiary problem is crucial as regards Florence's manifestations.

The argument put forward in *The Spiritualists* is that if Kate's manifestations were fraudulent, and if her mother were implicated (though there is no direct evidence for this latter conjecture),³

¹ *The Spiritualists*, p. 34.

² Since we do not deal later with the last of these points, we would comment here that Mr Hall's suggestion is the more surprising since the matter is made clear in a letter from Crookes to Blackburn dated May 11, 1874 which Hall himself quotes extensively. Crookes there refers to a test conducted at the seance of May 9 and adds: 'I deeply regret that it has only been obtained within about a week of Katie's apotheosis.' Katie's impending departure had, in fact, already been announced at the seance of May 4, and Crookes's remark not only pin-points the expected approximate date of this event, but makes it clear that Blackburn was perfectly well aware of it. Confirmation of this is given by Benjamin Coleman in an article published in *The Spiritualist* for May 15, 1874. He not only predicts the actual date, May 21, on which the departure was to take place but says that this was the date 'originally announced', evidently some considerable time before.

³ In the somewhat parallel case of Miss Rosina Showers (see p. 105), it is quite uncertain whether Mrs Showers was party to what seems to have been a long series of systematic frauds.

then it is inconceivable that Florence's phenomena, under the same family auspices, could have been authentic. But an equally plausible argument could be that Florence was a genuine medium, that for some reason or other Blackburn ceased to support her mediumship, thus threatening her family's financial well-being, and that they met the crisis by a fraudulent continuation of the form of physical phenomena most agreeable to their benefactor.

Returning to Crookes and Florence, one or two minor points concerning their personal relationship must be clarified. Florence's marriage to Edward Elgie Corner, on April 29, 1874, was not announced in *The Spiritualist* until June 19, and it has been conjectured by Trevor Hall that the event was kept a secret. The only evidence offered for this is that Florence signed herself 'Florence E. Cook' in a letter to Blackburn dated May 22. Florence's maiden and married names both begin with the same initial letter, and it might well have been a slip of the pen. But an alternative explanation is more probable. 'Florence Cook' was a name that had become famous among Spiritualists (as she herself says, 'I know perfectly well that I am one of the best mediums', see p. 71) and she may well have wished to retain this name for professional purposes, as do many 'stars' in other fields today. Evidence for this is to be found in a photograph, c. 1898, which is inscribed 'To my friend Mr Kahn: Florence Cook'. This photograph and its inscription is reproduced facing page 157 of Trevor Hall's book, but he ignores this later signature in unfolding his theory of Florence's deception regarding her marriage. It is, at any rate, certain that Crookes was aware of the impending marriage and made no secret of it (see Lord Rayleigh's letter, quoted on p. 107).

Sinister significance has also been attached by Trevor Hall to Crookes's trip to the Continent with Florence. However, it is only by rather careful selective quotation from Crookes's letter describing this event that anything scandalous can be suggested. We give this letter in full because it also fills in a gap in Florence's published manifestations between the departure of 'Katie King' (vividly described in Crookes's *Researches*) and the emergence of her successor 'Leila'.

From: William Crookes, 20 Mornington Road, London, N.W.
Sept 15, 1874

To: C. Blackburn, Esq., Parkfield, Nr. Didsbury, Manchester.
My dear Sir,

I have had a few seances with Mrs. Corner lately and as I think a little advance has been made in the phenomena, you will I suppose be glad if I report progress. Whilst Mr. Corner was in London very

little could be done. We had a few seances but with the exception of the last, on Friday Sept 4th, the phenomena were poor. On this occasion we had a face appear in the aperture (at Mr. Cook's in the cabinet in the breakfast room) when I was in the cabinet holding Mrs. Corner's two hands. During this time I saw hands in the upper part of the cabinet and felt them constantly. Mr. Corner then took my place in the cabinet, and hands again came and handled him rather roughly.

Mr. Corner left London for Stockton on Monday the 7th instant, and on the 13th Mrs. Crookes and I went to Hackney and had a seance with Mrs. Corner. On this occasion the face came to the aperture two or three times and was well visible to all in the room, whilst I was in the cabinet holding Mrs. Corner. Hands took things out of my pocket and held them up to the window and then threw them out to the company. A stool on which I was sitting was pulled from under me and floated about the upper part of the cabinet, and then stuffed into the window. All this time I was holding Mrs. Corner and saw what was going on, whilst the gas was alight in the room.

I then left the cabinet and Mrs. Crookes was told to go in. When she was there, holding Mrs. Corner, she was patted all over the head and face. A hand came to me, who was sitting outside the cabinet, took something out of my pocket, and, taking it into the cabinet put it into Mrs. Crookes' lap.

I asked if I might take hold of the hand. Permission being given I felt it all over, squeezed it and traced it along to the wrist, arm etc. It seemed to be a projection from Mrs. Corner's shoulder. (Mrs. Crookes was holding both hands all this time). A message was written in pencil 'We will do better soon', and the seance soon after closed.

Mr. Corner is not coming back to London before he goes abroad. He expects to be away for several months, and has given me the fullest permission to experiment to my heart's content with his wife provided I do not allow strangers to be present, and do not publish her name.

Mrs. Corner and her sister-in-law, Miss Corner, are going on Friday next to pay a visit to Prince Wittgenstein at Wiesbaden. I have occasion to go to Brussels at the same time, so I have consented, at Mr. Cook's request, to go by a different route to what I intended, and escort the ladies partly on their road. I expect Mrs. Corner here this evening to tell me the final arrangements, but it is pretty well settled, and we leave London on Friday evening and travel all night, via Harwich, Antwerp and Brussels.

When I have done my business in Brussels I have to go to Paris, and hope to return here by about Wednesday 23rd instant.

Mrs. Corner is not at all well. The last three months have played sad havoc with her good looks and health. I hope this visit will set her up again, and that she will return in good trim for further seances,

when I do not despair of getting a full form when I am with her in the cabinet. All her friends, myself not the least, are very grateful to you for your kindness to her. I have reason to know that your last act of generosity was peculiarly acceptable to her.

With kind regards to Mrs. and Miss Blackburn and yourself,

Believe me, Very truly yours,

WILLIAM CROOKES.

It will be noticed that the manifestations mentioned in Crookes's letter, far from being merely a reversion to Florence's earliest phenomena (as Trevor Hall maintains), show curious new features: the spare arm, for example, projecting from Florence's shoulder while Mrs Crookes held both her hands, is a distinct novelty!

While the sitting described in the letter just quoted took place at Mr Cook's residence, sittings in Crookes's own house appear not to have been terminated by 'Katie King's' departure on May 21, 1874. In a very interesting passage in a letter¹ dated August 29, 1874 to his assistant, Mr C. H. Gimingham, Crookes describes a sitting held on August 28 at 20 Mornington Road. He writes:

Florrie and Ted were here last night for a seance. She was very ill, fainting constantly. I however got Harrison to give me a little instruction about this fiend who has annoyed us all and I hope I have now succeeded in consigning it to the bottomless pit whence it came. I don't think it will trouble Florrie again.'

It is certainly very curious to meet again in the context of Crookes's sittings the recurring theme of 'the fiend', which we previously encountered in descriptions by Dr Purdon (see p. 53), and Stainton Moses (see p. 55). Crookes's hope that he had consigned it to the bottomless pit was not to be fulfilled (see p. 85). The spectacle of Crookes exorcising demons on instruction from Harrison is an odd one, and reveals the extent to which he accepted the literal truth of these conceptions. Crookes made no attempt to inform Blackburn of the activities of the 'fiend from the bottomless pit'. In his letter to Blackburn dated September 15, 1874, the only reference he makes to these sittings is that 'the phenomena were poor'.

It is to be noted that Crookes was on familiar Christian-name terms with Florence's husband Ted: certainly there is no suggestion that the 'revelation' of Florence's marriage on June 5 had discomposed Crookes, as one might have expected on the basis of Trevor Hall's proposition that Crookes was grossly deceived and Florence was his mistress at the time.

¹ Preserved in the Science Museum, London.

It appears that sittings with Florence in Crookes's house continued for at least the next nine months. The following remarkable letter appeared in *The Spiritualist* for June 25, 1875, p. 312.

20 Mornington-road,
London, N.W.

June 21, 1875.

My dear Florrie,

Great interest having been expressed as to the 'Leila' materialisations which have taken place through your mediumship at our house and elsewhere, I will with pleasure put down on paper some of the phenomena which have occurred under *my own* observations.

As the manifestations professed to be given solely for Mr. Crookes' information, most of the seances have necessarily been held here, but Leila has also appeared at three other houses. For the same reason my husband was at first almost constantly in the cabinet, and latterly he was allowed to go in and out as he liked; but it was by no means necessary for him to be present.

On several occasions we have all seen you and Leila at the same time. Once Leila and my husband were standing in the room with us talking, when you suddenly rushed out of the cabinet, pushed past them, and fell insensible on the floor. Leila scolded Mr. Crookes for allowing you to leave the cabinet, and disappeared. On another occasion you walked out in a trance, staggered about the room we were sitting in, and then went back into the cabinet: as you entered the cabinet you held the curtain on one side and let us see Leila standing a few feet from us in her usual white robe. Several similar occurrences have taken place at other times.

I may add that on almost every occasion I have heard you cough, sigh, move about, or speak in the cabinet, whilst Leila has been outside, talking to us.

On two occasions Leila, whose feet were always bare, took one of your shoes off, and asked me to put it on her foot. I knelt down by her side, and tried my utmost to squeeze her foot into it, but found it impossible to do so, her foot being so much larger than yours. Leila has appeared at our house between twenty and thirty times, and tests of your separate identities were given almost every night. On some occasions visitors were present, but we have had the best seances when you have been stopping with us as one of our family, and no stranger whatever was present.

Believe me, Affectionately yours,

ELLEN CROOKES.

Mrs. E. E. Corner, 6 Bruce-Villas, Eleanor Road, Hackney.

Certainly if we are prepared to accept Lady Crookes's account at its face value, the possibility of fraud, even with Crookes's connivance, seems to recede very far. We discuss the matter further in our final section. We have not so far been able to trace in-

dependent accounts of these sittings by the 'visitors' mentioned by Lady Crookes. Florence Cook, in the letter we are about to quote, mentions Mr Ionides as being present at one.¹

Worth reproducing at this stage is an interesting letter from Florence to Blackburn (in the Blackburn collection at the Britten Memorial Library) which relates to the Leila period.

6 Bruce Villas,
Eleanor Road, Richmond Road,
Hackney.
Saturday.

Dear Mr. Blackburn,

['12 June 75' added in another hand.]

Last Sunday I gave a seance at the Nevilles. The spirit 'Stella' appeared. There were no strangers present. On Wednesday there was a seance at Mornington Place ['Mr. Crookes's' added in another hand]. Mr. Ionides was present. He and Mr. Crookes had been to Ascot the day before and Leila told them of several things they did, describing the dress of the ladies, etc. She also told them of a place they stopped at on the way home and what they had to drink. Mr. Crookes had only just come home as I arrived on Wednesday as he had been staying with Ionides so that no communication whatsoever had taken place. On Thursday I went to 88 [?] Great Russell Street to have a quiet seance with Miss Kislingbury and Mr. Harrison; Lady Caithness came in when the seance was half over, but Mrs. Ross Church was there the whole time. She saw and recognized her daughter. Miss Kislingbury's sister also came and spoke in German. She gave some good tests. Mrs. Ross Church's daughter was born with a mal-formed lip. She showed herself with it. We had the cabinet in a corner of Mr. Harrison's [?] room. It was formed with some curtains put across a corner of the room. Next Wednesday I am going to a reception at Mrs. [?], and on Monday to the theatre so shall not have so many seances that week. Mr. Crookes is at Leeds.

With love,

Yours affectionately,
F. E. CORNER.

Give my love to your daughter. How is Mr. [?]

An undated letter from Florence to Blackburn (clearly written before the letter just quoted) concerns a disagreement between them. As summarized by Trevor Hall² it gives a somewhat sinister impression, not borne out by perusal of the original. This is one of a series of such letters (preserved in the Britten Memorial

¹ It is also possible that Myers was present at some of this series of sittings. In his diary he records his attendance at seances with Florence on January 7, 25, and 27, and on April 11, 1875, the first with 'E.G.' (doubtless Edmund Gurney) though unfortunately he does not note the location.

² *The Spiritualists*, p. 113.

Library) of which, by and large, only fragments survive though this one is fortunately complete. It reads:

6 Bruce Villas,
Eleanor Road, Richmond Road,
Hackney.
Monday.

Dear Mr. Blackburn,

I hardly think you understand my position with regard to seances. By giving seances I am acting in direct opposition to the will of my husband. All our differences have arisen from my refusal to give up Spiritualism. I have his consent to give seances to you and Mr. Crookes only, consequently if I sit with 'varieties of company' I run the risk of making Ted retract his consent. Not that I should obey his wishes in that respect for he married me knowing I was a medium and always said before we were married that he would never attempt to stop seances. As to Mr. Crookes 'paying for sittings under the rose' I should be very displeased if he offered to pay me. If I were unmarried it would be another matter.

I think you will remember saying to me 'Florrie directly you marry have done with Spiritualism' so I can not see how you can complain of my not sitting. I had had three years hard work and my health was failing consequently I think I was quite right to give up for a time. With regard to me losing the power to materialize that is an utter absurdity. Last night I was at Mr. George Neville's. I had never been in the house before and did not go with the intention of giving a seance. Mrs. Basset was there and had a very good sitting and I thought I would go into the dark drawing room and try if I could get anything. A full form appeared in less than 5 minutes. Mr. Neville was told to come in the cabinet but could see nothing. The figure appeared again and he followed it in but it was gone directly. The spirit was neither Katie nor Leila. It appeared as an indistinct white lump which gradually took the form of a woman. This hardly looks like want of power. I also gave a dark seance on Saturday. Mr. Crookes was not present at either. Do not think by that that I do not intend him to come to the seances but I merely wished to prove that I am not dependent on him for a seance. I am not a devotee to anyone nor will I be controlled by anyone, with regard to what I shall say or do in connection with seances. You are the first person to tell me I have a 'weak nature'. I admit that I will often give way for the sake of peace and quietness but if I am really roused to make a stand no one can turn me from my purpose. My present intention is to sit when and where I like and I shall not be fettered by Mr. Crookes or anyone else. I know perfectly well that I am one of the best mediums and by my mediumship will make any amount of friends. I feel extremely hurt at the way you have written to me. I was the first to get a full form and worked hard at seances giving up health and pleasure for it. And then because I act upon your advice and do not get anything fresh because I did not

cultivate it, you seem annoyed and make Mr. Crookes's short-comings the excuse to say unkind things to me. I can quite understand Mr. Crookes not writing to you as I know he was very busy and as to talking to you about me he had nothing to say and moreover has no right to interfere in my affairs. As to whether you are friends with him that is nothing to do with me. If he likes to have seances with other mediums he is perfectly welcome to. Spiritualism would never spread if a medium objected to her friends sitting with anyone else. Now dear Mr. Blackburn do write and tell me that all this is at an end. You need not be afraid of me losing my mediumship or becoming subject to anyone. You know I would do anything in the way of seances to oblige you. I am going to have a seance with Mrs. Basset tomorrow, and will write to tell you all about it.

With love,

I am,

Yours affectionately,

F. E. CORNER.

Mr. Arnold (editor of Telegraph) and Harrison were present last night.

It is to be noted that Blackburn's quarrel with Crookes was due not, apparently to any *moral* short-comings of the latter but to his not having written sufficiently frequently to Blackburn and to his having directed his interest to other mediums. If Blackburn were still financing Florence and if Crookes were still her accredited manager, this could well be a legitimate grievance.

Some five years later Florence gave another account to Hensleigh Wedgwood and a Mrs Everett (an automatic-writing medium) of her husband's attitude to her mediumistic activities, and it is interesting to compare the two. The following is extracted from a description by Mrs Everett (in the Everett Diaries, preserved by the S.P.R.) of a sitting held on November 14, 1881.

I was very nervous about going today to Mr. Wedgwood's, because Edward's experience of Saturday [of a sitting with the medium Rita] was unfortunate. When we arrived and were shown into the library, we found Mrs. Corner already there. She is a tiny little woman, much prettier than Miss Cook;¹ very dark: . . .

[The ensuing pages describe a sitting in which Florence and Arthur Coleman acted as mediums. The narrative continues as follows.]

A propos of the ill-health of a medium when unable to hold seances, Mrs. Corner told us some particulars about herself. When quite a young girl great anxiety was felt about her health, and she was so drowsy and heavy she scarcely ever seemed to be fully awake. She

¹ I.e. Kate Cook, Florence's sister.

would sleep on the sofa through the whole evening, and if aroused had violent hysterical fits. Her mother knew nothing of spiritualism and was in despair about her, when she was advised by a friend to take her to a spirit circle. She proved, as the friend expected, to be a medium; and the feeling of relief and new life in herself no words could describe. Her health improved as her mediumship developed, and she soon became quite well and strong; all the drowsiness, and hysterical symptoms leaving her. When she married her husband was strongly prejudiced against spiritualism and much averse to her ever sitting as a medium; so when she went abroad with him she promised it should be entirely given up and for some months spiritualism was a forbidden word in their house. Very soon her health became affected, and the old symptoms of lethargy and hysteria returned. Other remedies were tried without effect; and at last she begged her husband to allow her to sit as an experiment. He consented, and she soon became quite well. He is not now averse to her doing so, of course privately; and she finds to keep in health it is necessary for her to have a seance about once a week.

It is not clear when the sittings with Florence at Mornington Road terminated. We have it on the authority of Fournier d'Albe¹ that Crookes befriended Florence until her death in 1904, and it is an interesting speculation whether he had any further experience of her mediumship in the intervening years. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle² quotes the letter of condolence written by Crookes on the occasion of Florence's death. It is dated April 24, 1904, and in it he says:

Convey Lady Crookes's and my own sincerest sympathy to the family in their irreparable loss. We trust that the certain belief that our loved ones, when they have passed over, are still watching over us — a belief which owes so much of its certainty to the mediumship of Mrs. Corner (or Florence Cook, as she will always be in our memory) — will strengthen and console those who are left behind.

It has been considered strange and possibly suspicious that Crookes, while never ceasing in private to express faith in Florence's manifestations, should in public have confined his remarks concerning his psychical investigations to the phenomena of D. D. Home. We conclude this section with an important letter from Crookes to Sir Oliver Lodge (preserved by the Lodge family) which throws an interesting light on this question:

7 Kensington Park Gardens,
London, W.

July 5th 1909.

My dear Lodge,

I have just finished reading Mrs. Finch's article about Eusapia

¹ *The Life of Sir William Crookes*, p. 236.

² *The History of Spiritualism*, Vol. 1, Cassell, London, 1926, p. 257.

Palladino, and I wrote immediately to her asking that my name should be removed from the 'Editorial Board' of the 'Annals of Psychical Science'.

I consider the article is a most disgusting one, and how a lady like Mrs. Finch, who I always considered refined and delicate minded, should have put such a nasty, dirty set of ideas on paper, passes my understanding. What she says is bad enough, but what she leaves unsaid, obvious enough to those who can read between the lines, is much worse. She leads one to infer, in no dubious manner, that the men investigators of Eusapia, (of whom you are one!), are actuated by immoral motives, and that the medium either hypnotises the sitters by her foul caresses, or adopts other and more direct means for rewarding them for giving false evidence. The idea of three thorough sceptics like Carrington, Fielding [sic] and Baggally, being overcome by such wiles, is too amusing, but that your honoured name should be even most remotely associated with such obscenities is horrible.

This is the tax one has to pay for investigating phenomena with female mediums. Hints and inuendoes have been freely circulated about all previous investigators, but I am not aware that they have ever been published in so open a manner.

For myself I have been so troubled by hints and rumours in connection with Miss Cook, that I shrink from laying stress on what I tried with her mediumship and rely on phenomena connected with Dan. Home's mediumship when saying anything in public.

With kind regards, believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

WILLIAM CROOKES.

6. KATE COOK'S MEDIUMSHIP

In contrast with Florence, her sister, Kate Cook, features rather infrequently in Spiritualist writings of the '70's and '80's. J. W. Fletcher describes her as 'about 17 years of age, below the average height, and decidedly *spirituelle* in appearance'.¹ Mrs Everett's comment,² somewhat less flattering, is 'very petite, but not at all pretty'. Kate's principal materialization called itself 'Lily Gordon.' In *The Medium and Daybreak* for May 24, 1872 (p. 198) there is a note on what is described as Kate's first successful trance, in the course of which her deceased aunt communicated by speech and writing.

Trevor Hall³ treats Kate Cook's phenomena as though they were self-evidently fraudulent. Certainly, as Mr Hall has shown, it appears to be a direct result of Kate's 'mediumship' that, eventually, the bulk of Charles Blackburn's fortune passed to the

¹ *The Medium and Daybreak*, August 16, 1878, p. 519.

² *The Everett Diaries*, Vol. 1, p. 81 (preserved in the Archives of the S.P.R.).

³ *The Spiritualists* Chapters 8 and 9.

Cook family. Much of her phenomena seems hard to take very seriously and there is no doubt that at least a section of the more sober contemporary Spiritualist opinion did not accept their authenticity. Stainton Moses's single comment, for example, is uncompromising. He says, in a notebook entry dated October 26, 1878:¹

Since I came back [i.e. from holiday in Scotland] I have had two sittings with Miss Kate Cook. The so called spirit was undoubtedly the body of the medium.

F. W. H. Myers, on the other hand, evidently considered Kate's sittings worthy of his continued attention, since according to his diary he was present at four during 1878 (three of which, on October 6, 13 and 17, may have included the two mentioned by Stainton Moses), five during the last quarter of 1879, and one even as late as January 4, 1882, a year after the confession of a self-styled accomplice (see below).

Miss Georgina Houghton, while herself having no doubt that Kate's phenomena were genuine, makes it clear that her mediumship was under suspicion in some quarters. In the course of her description of a seance with Kate held on February 17, 1881, she says:²

I must also own that the tales I had heard circulated made me doubly watchful. . . .

Miss Houghton would no doubt have read a statement made in court by one James Maddocks, during the trial of Mr J. W. Fletcher, which was quoted in full in *The Spiritualist* for February 4, 1881 (see also *The Spiritualists*, pp. 129-30). He claimed to be a confederate of the Fletchers (two American mediums prominent at the time), and in the course of his statement he says:

Yes, Miss Cook sitting next to me and Mr. Fletcher on her right. When the lights were put out Miss Cook took her hand from me and took the cork out of a phosphorous bottle which she had so as to admit the air and make it luminous, and she got up and went to the other side of the room and put a piece of muslin over her face. . . . She appeared as a spirit, and I believe she spoke, but I could not tell what she said.

It is to be noted that no answer to this accusation ever appeared from Kate or her friends.

There certainly appears good reason to suspect that Kate was a

¹ *Light*, Summer 1963, p. 75.

² Miss Houghton, *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Seance*, Second Series, E. W. Allen, London, 1882, p. 339.

fraud. And yet, here as elsewhere, if we are to be quite impartial we have to admit to an uncomfortable element of doubt, and this is based not least on the words of the 'accomplice' himself. The very simple trickery he describes, the uncorked phosphorous bottle and the piece of muslin over the face, seem too disparate with the spectacular effects described by some of the observers at her seances.

Crookes never appears to have had dealings with Kate Cook, and any very lengthy incursion into the problem of her mediumship would lead us rather far afield. We shall content ourselves with one or two representative quotations from the contemporary accounts.

One observer who makes striking claims for Kate's phenomena was T. L. Nichols, M.D., who had earlier been responsible for a biographical work on the Davenport brothers. In a note in *The Psychological Review*, Dr Nichols writes:¹

I have never had the opportunity to test Mrs. Corner, but her mediumship, I understand, is very similar to that of her younger sister, Miss Cook; and in her case I have had the most satisfactory tests. I have held her hand while she was raised into the air so that her feet were more than four feet from the floor. I have placed my hand on her head in the cabinet and at the same time held the hand of the materialised spirit. I have felt the naked feet of the spirit, and instantly placed my hand upon the fully buttoned-up boots of the medium. Also, I have seen the medium in her dark clothes, and the spirit in white standing side by side.

Earlier, in 1878, he had given a lengthy account² of his first Kate Cook sitting. This took place in the studio of Signor Rondi, an Italian artist, in Montagu Place. Dr Nichols says:

The studio is simply a second floor front, with little furniture and many pictures. A green curtain hung across a corner of the room, behind which was an arm-chair. Daylight was shut out and the gas lighted. Miss Cook went behind the curtain, and in the space of three breaths a young lady, dressed from head to foot in pure white, stood before us in the opening of the curtain.

Miss Cook, I may observe, was dressed entirely in black, in the usual elaborate fashion; she wore high boots, closely buttoned. Change of costume in the time was impossible. Lily was clothed in the most graceful white drapery, which she allowed me to handle and examine. The drapery around her head and chest was fine, soft, wonderfully elastic, like the most delicate Indian muslins. The skirt was of a thicker, heavier kind, like linen.

¹ *The Psychological Review*, Vol. II, London, 1880, p. 561.

² *The Spiritualist*, May 10, 1878, pp. 225-6.

Dr Nichols goes on to describe the 'spirit', 'Lily Gordon', stating incidentally that she 'had not come by any trap door or sliding panel'. Later in his report, he says:

She was very human, this Lily, seeming vain of her dress and of her person. She borrowed a pair of scissors of Signor Rondi, and, inviting me to come near her, she took up a fold of the drapery which covered her bosom, and cut from it a piece six inches long and two and a half wide. I clearly saw it cut, clip by clip. She gave similar keepsakes to two others; yet the dress, a moment after, seemed as perfect as before.¹

Towards the end of the seance Nichols asked for a 'test' and it appears that his request was favourably received. He says:

The tests were given as desired. I entered the cabinet, and found Miss Cook sitting in the chair, seemingly in a profound sleep, her hands folded together in her lap. I passed my hand over her dark wool clothing and her closely-buttoned boots. Then Lily brought her out before us all — the two standing side by side; one in black, one from head to foot in purest white. Then another form in white came on the other side, and we saw the three standing before us. A little later Lily said 'Good bye'. I took her hand and pressed it to my lips; she answered with a gentle pressure, and I was very sorry to have her go, and hope to see her again.

Similar accounts were published from time to time by other writers. In January 1879 Rondi, in a letter to Blackburn,² reported that, before the seance of that week,

Mrs. and Miss Tebb and Lady Coomara tested, by taking off all Miss Cook's clothes, and carefully examining them, and when she redressed bringing her at once and placing her in the cabinet chair; then Lillie soon appeared, with heaps of white drapery, and allowed the examiners, also Mr. Diss and Mr. Green, to go into the cabinet and feel that Miss Cook was seated in her chair.

At least, the sitters seem to have taken to heart the much publicized use of the medium's 'drawers' (see p. 117) as a hiding place for the spirit drapery — supposing, of course, that 'all Miss Cook's clothes' did include her drawers!

During this seance, too, 'Lillie' and Kate are alleged to have been seen together, and this seems to have been a feature of Kate's seances. Rondi describes similar events, on other occasions, in such impressive detail that, as we have been forced to say in connection with other similar testimony, it is hard to resist the con-

¹ Cf. Crookes's claim to have observed a similar effect in connection with Katie King, p. 135.

² *The Spiritualist*, January 17, 1879, p. 25.

clusion either that a paranormal manifestation took place or that the witness was deliberately lying. A sample of Rondi's testimony, concerning a sitting in his own studio, is as follows:¹

Last Tuesday, sitting near Miss Cook and conversing with her, I perceived the spirit emanate from the floor close to her feet; when fully developed, I asked the spirit . . . to go with the medium near the window. In obedience to my request, the spirit and medium moved and walked together, and stood close to the Venetian blinds facing each other. Being then too far away from them, I asked permission to be allowed to go near the window, so as to enable me to see both faces. Having received an affirmative answer, I sought the most convenient and favourable place, two paces from them, and observed the fully materialised form kiss Miss Cook with her face uncovered, and Miss Cook speaking with Lillie. The form sank and rose again several times. Miss Cook being tired, she sat on the sofa, which was close by her, two minutes or so; Lillie turned round, walked close to me, shook hands, gave me a kiss on my forehead, and, wishing me 'good night', returned towards the medium and disappeared.

This incident is somewhat reminiscent of the famous materialization episode with D. D. Home described by Lady Crookes and others (see p. 136).

Events of a similar nature are reported as happening at Charles Blackburn's house in Manchester.² Blackburn himself³ describes a seance with Kate in which the cabinet was dispensed with altogether, the medium being seated in an armchair in the corner. The only sitters were Blackburn and his daughter. The light was unfortunately very dim, and it is not clear from Blackburn's narrative that it would have been impossible for the medium to have left her chair, though the risk would appear to have been considerable.

During the course of a lengthy unpublished narrative by Major-General J. N. H. Maclean, preserved in the Britten Memorial Library, some later seances are described in which there was no cabinet and the medium sat among the sitters, though, since these sittings were held in the Cooks' own house, imposture would presumably have been facilitated. Maclean, at the time of his narrative, had been sitting with Kate for two years. Writing of a seance held in October 1880, he says:

On the 25th of October the party assembled at 53 Eleanor Road, the house of Mrs. Cook, was Mrs. and Miss Cook and Edie Cook, —

¹ *The Spiritualist*, March 1, 1878, p. 106.

² See, in particular, a long account by one 'W.H.C.', *The Spiritualist*, September 19, 1879, p. 135.

³ *The Spiritualist*, October 19, 1877, p. 187.

a little girl of 12 years of age, Colonel Evans, Mrs. Reines, Mrs. Parrick and myself; we sat in a row with Miss Katie Cook seated on a low chair a few paces in front of us. The first part of the seance was in the dark and very shortly after taking our seats Lillie appeared with her bright spirit light and at once entered into conversation with us all. . . . Miss Cook, who was sitting close in front of us, and from the light coming in from the street quite visible to sight, then said 'There is something gathering in a heap near me like soft coarse flannel, I cannot make out what it is, I have never had a similar experience before.' We all observed what she referred to, and at last the heap gradually rose up and formed itself into a figure of a person covered over by a plaid or shawl, almost touching the medium Miss Cook. I was sitting near and my hand was grasped by a materialized hand thrust out from the figure, but covered with the shawl or plaid; . . .

Subsequently, Major-General Maclean tells us,

all the party drew near and each one in turn grasped the apparition's hand and saw what I have described.

Later, on November 16, 1880, the apparition (which by then answered to the name 'Janet') emerged from its shawl, displaying, as Maclean writes, 'a face quite unfamiliar and entirely differing in features and appearance from either Lillie or the medium. It was a round shaped chubby highland face with rather high cheek bones, a prominent short nose, light coloured hair and as far as could be discerned blue eyes. . . .'

There is scope for further work on Kate Cook's alleged mediumship. Dr Purdon's rather technical testimony, mentioned on p. 55, never appears to have properly evaluated. Furthermore, much of the 'Lillie Gordon' direct writing is available in the Britten Memorial Library in its original form (contrary to Trevor Hall's statement), and it would be of considerable interest to have an expert evaluation of 'Lillie's' handwriting in relation to Kate's (specimens of which also exist in the Britten Library).

As regards the published claims for Kate's 'materialisations', there seems no solid basis for a judgment since it is hardly possible to estimate the reliability of the witnesses. However, it is broadly true that the phenomena are no more, or no less, absurd than those of, say, D. D. Home or Stainton Moses. It is much to be hoped that there will come to light further unpublished testimony, preferably from witnesses of whom we know more than we do of General Maclean. It would, for example, be of the greatest interest to have Myers's impressions of his ten or more sittings with Kate Cook.

Three years after the death of Kate's sister Florence, in 1904,

Florence's husband, Captain Edward Elgie Corner, married Kate. Mr Trevor Hall makes the remarkable suggestion¹ that Captain Corner forced Kate to marry him by threatening to make public 'incriminating correspondence' between Kate's familiar, 'Lillie Gordon', and Charles Blackburn, of which Corner is supposed to have possessed himself. There appears to be no shadow of evidence for this: rather the contrary. The letters to which Hall refers (quoted in part in his book) were ultimately sent to the Britten Memorial Library by Miss Lilian Dixon, Corner's niece. Hall remarks: 'How they came into her keeping is not recorded as far as we know', and he postulates that Corner had purloined them before Kate could destroy them. In reality, there is no mystery as to how the documents came into Miss Dixon's possession. A statement in her own hand, written on the envelope containing a copy of Maclean's narrative, reads: 'Copied by me from original M.S.S. belonging to Kate Cook long before she married Uncle Ted (Cap. Edw. Elgie Corner). I have some items of Lillie Gordon's direct writing given to me also by Katie.' This seems sufficiently clear to make speculation unnecessary: the letters were in Kate's possession, and the suggestion that Corner had them and was withholding them from her for blackmail purposes may be thought to be merely fanciful.

7. FLORENCE COOK'S LATER CAREER

In Sections 5 and 6 we have traced Florence's career through her 'Katie King' period and then on into her 'Leila' period, up to the middle of 1875. At some time after this, 'Leila' was replaced by a 'control' known as 'Marie', purporting to be a young French girl, and 'Marie' was a central figure at the majority of Florence's sittings until their termination just before her death. The 'Marie' sittings fall into two periods. The first, broken up by long voyages with her husband, Captain Corner, seems to have terminated around the end of 1881 (the last sitting that we have traced being that with Hensleigh Wedgwood and Mrs Everett, referred to in Section 5, which took place in November, 1881). The second period began in the '90's and ended, apparently, in 1903, a few months before her death. The cause of the ten or eleven year break is not clear.

The most publicized episode in the earlier 'Marie' period has been the seizure of the 'spirit' by Sir George Sitwell on January 9, 1880. The version of this event which has become widely known is that of Sir George's son, Sir Osbert Sitwell, in his autobio-

¹ *The Spiritualists*, p. 165.

graphy *Left Hand: Right Hand!*¹ (see also *The Spiritualists*, pp. 132-4). This seance was held under the auspices of the British National Association of Spiritualists, whose Council at that time included Stainton Moses, E. Dawson Rogers, Dr Wyld, Frank Podmore and E. T. Bennett, all of whom were later Council Members, and the two last Honorary Secretaries, of the S.P.R.

In *Spiritual Notes* for February 1880 (pp. 351-5) there is an interesting report of the discussion of the Sitwell seizure at the subsequent Council meeting of the British National Association. Sir George Sitwell and his friend Carl von Buch, who had assisted in the exposure, were invited to give evidence at this meeting. It was common ground that on this occasion 'Marie' was in fact Florence, and the issue disputed was, as usual, whether the deception was conscious or not. An important circumstance, which seems not to have been adequately emphasised, is that von Buch, having requested that he should tie the medium, deliberately, according to his own statement, left the knots loose enough to be slipped. Thus, if one were prepared to give Florence the benefit of the doubt, one would have to admit the possibility of somnambulism (a much favoured word at that time), though it is certainly unfortunate that the somnambulism should have involved the removal of all her clothing except her corset and flannel petticoat. Mr Dawson Rogers stressed, as a paranormal event, the disappearance of the 'materialised' white drapery, though the confusion seems to have been such that this can hardly be considered to be a circumstance of high evidential value.

In Florence's final period, the earliest sittings that we have been able to trace took place in August of 1892, in the Corner's house in Usk, Monmouthshire. They are described by Florence Marryat in her second book on Spiritualism, *The Spirit World*, F. V. White, London, 1894. Florence Marryat was certainly not the most reliable of witnesses, but these sittings are worth some attention since they throw a light, of sorts, on the final relations between Florence and Charles Blackburn, who had died some eighteen months earlier on January 15, 1891.

The phenomena at these sittings consisted principally of 'direct writing', alleged by Florence Marryat to have taken place on tables 'far beyond' her and Florence Corner's reach. This 'direct writing' took the form of letters from a certain 'John Powles', a deceased friend of Florence Marryat. But a second 'spirit' was attempting to control the writing, this being one 'C.B.' Florence Marryat says:

¹ Macmillan, London, 1945.

These initials stand for the name of a man who had greatly wronged Florence Corner by leading her to expect she would be amply remembered in his will, inducing her to lay out a considerable sum of money in consequence, and then altering his will in favour of somebody else without giving her the slightest warning of his intentions. His death, therefore, left her and her husband in a difficult position, from which it cost them a considerable sum to extricate themselves. The spirit of C.B. was haunting the house at the time I was there, conscience-stricken, I suppose, and anxious to give some explanation of his conduct, but Florence would not give him the opportunity of speaking, she felt his influence to be so low.

The first letter reputed to be given by 'direct writing' is quoted as saying:

It is very unpleasant to deal with C.B. His standing is low, morally and physically. . . . Even now, C.B. is in the toils of a bad, unscrupulous woman. My dear heart [i.e. Florence Marryat], you and she [Florence Corner] will do a great deal, but be careful. She is heavily handicapped. God bless you, Flo — J.P. This man C.B. is low.

A second letter again refers to C.B. as 'a miserable, low spirit', and remarks on 'the pernicious influence of that bad woman'. Whatever the origin of these letters, they can presumably fairly be taken as representing Florence's point of view. Those who have followed Trevor Hall's analysis of the relations between the Cook family and Charles Blackburn will find this an interesting postscript, and will probably agree in identifying the 'bad, unscrupulous woman' with Florence's sister Kate.

Over the next ten years, Florence gave a very great number of sittings, most of which are reported as following much the same pattern. A cabinet was almost always used, frequently taking the form of a curtain hung across the corner of a room. Florence would be tied with cord or tape or with lengths of chain, and various arrangements of handcuffs, padlocks and seals would be added from time to time. After an interval of varying length 'Marie', and other 'spirit forms', would emerge, sometimes singly and sometimes together. Most of the reports stress that 'Marie', normally bare-footed, was a number of inches taller than Florence, this being stated by several authors to have been ascertained by direct measurement.

The difficulty with these accounts is two-fold: in most cases we know so little about their authors that there is no basis for estimating the reliability of these persons as witnesses, and in addition many of the most superficially impressive reports are so devoid of essential detail as to be virtually worthless as evidence. In the

latter category must fall accounts by Harry Boddington¹ and by Gambier Bolton.² Both of these authors make very strong claims. Boddington, for example, describes a series of sittings held in Battersea over a period of three months, during which 'the medium submitted to every reasonable test scepticism could devise'. He says that eighty members of the first Battersea Spiritualist Society attended these sittings, which were held in 'good photographic red light'. The cabinet arrangements and the method of securing the medium seem sound enough, and 'Marie' duly appeared, 'so utterly unlike her medium that to mistake one for the other was impossible'. But all that Boddington offers us concerning this remarkable set of sittings is a three page account, published forty or so years later, with no dates (not even the year), no sitters' names and, in fact, no supporting evidence whatsoever. Very much the same is true of Gambier Bolton's report. It seems almost unbelievable that events which, if they happened as described are of such obvious importance, should have been treated so light-heartedly.

However, there are to be found scattered through the Spiritualist literature a dozen or so reports covering the period 1898 to 1903 which give a fair amount of detail. If the accounts are reliable they seem to add up to a not unimpressive picture, but, as we have said, there is mostly no sufficient basis for judging the reliability of the witnesses. Reports by Lieut. Col. G. L. Le Mesurier Taylor³ (a member of the S.P.R.) of sittings in Cheltenham in August 1898; by a German Society of Spiritualists⁴ of sittings in Berlin in January and February, 1899; by Dr Wratzowski⁵ of some unsuccessful sittings in Warsaw later in 1899; and by Captain (later Sir Ernest) Bennett⁶ (an S.P.R. Council member from 1903) of a sitting in Gloucester during Christmas of 1901, are mentioned in *The Spiritualists*. Of these only the last showed the spectacular features of the 'Katie King' era, and Trevor Hall remarks: 'In view of what we know of her sittings at this period the account by Captain Bennett is frankly incredible. Either the whole account was pure fiction⁷ written as a Christmas

¹ Harry Boddington, *Materialisations*, Psychic Press, London, 1938, pp. 40-3.

² Gambier Bolton, *Ghosts in Solid Form*, Rider, London, 1914, pp. 40-4 and 57-60.

³ *Journal of the American S.P.R.*, Vol. XVI, November 1921, pp. 499-519.

⁴ See *The Spiritualists*, pp. 152-8.

⁵ *Psychische Studien*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 546-51, 604-9, 1899.

⁶ *What Was the Figure? A Real Christmas 'Ghost Story'*, *Wide World Magazine*, December, 1920, pp. 193-6.

⁷ It is unlikely that Bennett was deliberately writing fiction. At the head of the story it is stated that 'The Author vouches absolutely for the accuracy of the particulars', and in 1939, in his book *Apparitions and Haunted Houses* (Faber,

ghost story or Captain Bennett's memory had completely betrayed him.'

It is not clear what prompts Mr Hall to make this remark. Bennett's story reads very like a good few others of this period recording full-form materializations. Reference may be made to accounts by E. Browne¹ (of sittings on 21 and 22 October 1899 at the residence of Count and Countess Zbcrowski, where 'Marie' was measured and found to be some inches taller than Florence), by Mrs E. Bathe² (of a sitting in August 1899), by A. Peters³ (of sittings from April 1898), by Mary Mack Wall⁴ (of sittings early in 1900), by Fernand Le Rendu de Longueval⁵ (of a sitting in Paris in July 1900), by Dr Hinkovic⁶ (of sittings in the 1899 period), and by Miss H. A. Dallas⁷ (of a sitting in May 1903). Several of these authors emphasize that Florence sat without payment.

Mary Mack Wall's contribution in *Light* for March 24, 1900 is noteworthy in that 'Marie' and Florence are claimed to have been seen together, and is otherwise representative enough to be worth quoting.

SEANCE WITH MRS CORNER

We, the undersigned, testify that, at a seance at Miss Mack Wall's residence, on the evening of March 7th, at which we were present, we saw Mrs. Corner and her control, 'Marie', at the same time. 'Marie' was keeping the curtain back with one hand while with the other she held a luminous slate over the head of Mrs. Corner as she lay back in her chair, entranced. 'Marie' opened the curtain three times to show us herself and the medium thus — once in the middle and twice at the end nearest Mrs. Corner. Only one of our circle failed to see both figures and only saw the control. Her failure to do so was partly owing to position and partly to weakness of sight. But her husband was among the seers and she heard our remarks and exclamations at the time, and fully believes that the phenomenon occurred.

After the third time of opening the curtain, 'Marie' exclaimed exultantly: 'There, I have done it! I have done what you wanted. I have kept my promise,' and then in her triumph, she threw the

London, 1939), he refers to 'the baffling phenomena of the materializing seance' in connection with 'my own personal experience of sittings with well-known mediums like Florence Cook ...'.

¹ *Light*, November 4, 1899, p. 520.

² *Light*, September 2, 1899, p. 412.

³ *Light*, March 10, 1900, p. 113.

⁴ *Light*, March 24, 1900, p. 135, and April 21, 1900, pp. 187-90.

⁵ *Revue Spirite*, August 1900, summarized in *Light*, August 25, 1900, p. 403.

⁶ *Psychische Studien*, July 1904, quoted in *Light*, July 30, 1904, pp. 362-3.

⁷ *Light*, October 14, 1916, p. 334.

luminous card over the heads of the sitters to the other end of the room.

There was a strong red glow of light diffused over the room throughout the seance from a brazier lamp behind a screen of Turkey-red art muslin, and Mrs. Corner had, before it commenced, stripped to her last garment in the presence of some of the lady sitters and then had re-clad herself in garments provided by Miss Mack Wall, after which she was not left a moment alone. She was most securely bound to her chair, which was fastened to an iron ring in the floor and each hand was tied to an arm of the chair, with only two inches play allowed. All the knots were stitched over with coloured thread and everything was found intact afterwards.

M. E. WRIGHT

L. WRIGHT.

HENRY WRIGHT.

A. R.

F. E. CARBERY.

W. E. CARBERY.

H. DAMER-CAPE.

MARY MACK WALL.

JOHN COX.

Note: — 'Marie's' exultation was simply caused by her having on this occasion succeeded in showing herself and the medium at the same time to the whole circle — with the one exception — and, as I had some seances previously requested she should, by the aid of the luminous card. Since Christmas the medium's form has several times been seen by one or more of the sitters, together with a materialised spirit figure, under circumstances which I hope to relate in detail in another communication. Also, at a subsequent seance which was held on the 13th inst. with a circle of sixteen sitters, seven of whom were present for the first time, the two forms were seen at the same time in the same way as before, by three other sitters and myself; one of these sitters was a new comer.

'A.R.' is reluctantly obliged, for private reasons, to withhold her full name, but it, with her address, is known to the Editor of 'Light', who is also acquainted with nearly all those who have signed.

Chelsea, S.W.

MARY MACK WALL.

Mrs Effie Bathe's published account in *Light* (referred to above) follows the usual 'Marie' pattern. However, something rather different was going on behind the scenes, as is shown by the following letter to Dr Abraham Wallace, preserved in the Britten Memorial Library.

Hurstborne Lodge,
Ashchurch Park Villas,
Goldhawk Road, W.
October 18 [1899].

My dear Dr. Wallace,

I shall expect you here 7.15 on Thursday (tomorrow) and will arrange for Mr. Peters to meet you and Mr. and Mrs. Shaw. We had an awful time last night with Mrs. Corner, only kindly make no mention of it to Peters as perhaps he would not sit in the cellar. That man from below came up and held the cabinet practically the

whole evening. We had *tremendous* knocks and a gentleman went in and sat with her in the cabinet and they then lessened in power and he sank [?] down into the basement. Later he obsessed Mrs. Corner and I had quite a scuffle with her in this state, he wanted to get her down in the cellar to materialize. I am greatly distressed at this development and if you and Mr. Shaw could be here at 7, I could tell you more, but mind not a word before *Peters*.

If we can't stop this devil coming up I shall have to break up the seances.

Yours ever sincerely,
EFFIE BATHE.

This curious narrative shows that the theme of the intruding 'devil', which we previously encountered in the early Dr Purdon sittings (p. 53), in that described by Stainton Moses (p. 55), and in an 'exorcising' episode with Crookes (p. 68), had persisted into Florence's last period.

As Mr Hall remarks, it is both surprising and unfortunate that Sir Ernest Bennett seems to have made no attempt to induce other members of the S.P.R. to attend Florence's sittings. However, one other account (besides those of Bennett and Lieutenant Colonel Taylor) by a member of the Society exists¹ and is worth reproducing since the phenomena reported were of a rather more positive nature than those observed by Lieutenant Colonel Taylor. The author, Miss H. A. Dallas, was a respected figure in the Society for many years and is perhaps best known for her books on the 'cross-correspondences'. She writes:

When looking over an old notebook lately I found some records which may interest readers of *LIGHT*. One of these is the account of a seance with Mrs. Corner. This took place in the drawing-room of near relatives of mine. Three of my family were present besides myself, and four of our acquaintances had been invited to be with us. The date was May 17, 1903.

My first note was concerning the impression Mrs. Corner made upon me. 'Mrs. Corner impressed me as a particularly simple, straightforward woman. If face and manner are a true indication of character, I should not hesitate to say that she is honest'.

Mrs. Corner was dressed in black, and under her skirt she wore a black petticoat; a lace collar and white pocket-handkerchief were the only white objects visible on her person.

We had rigged up a cabinet, and put some red material round the lamp to screen the yellow rays; these were not quite sufficiently shut off, however; yellow light showed above. The room was light enough to enable us to see each other's faces fairly clearly.

Mrs. Corner was tied into a chair in the cabinet by one of the

¹ *Light*, October 14, 1916, p. 334.

gentlemen present. (She always preferred to be tied on these occasions.) Mr. H— tied a piece of red tape round each wrist and then fastened it to the arms of the chair, so that her hands could only twist round the arms, not move away from them. Then a metal chain was fastened round her waist and to the back of the chair. She made no objection to this at all. She suggested that if we liked we might sew the knots of the tapes round her wrists to make them more secure; but we did not care to do this. (This had been done by one of the members of our circle on a previous occasion, the sewing being done with *coloured silks*.)

We sat quietly for a considerable time, then Mrs. Corner groaned a little, and one of our circle was told by a voice in the cabinet to go inside and look at the medium. He found that her arm had twisted round the arm of the chair and she seemed uncomfortable. She seemed to have been in trance and did not know how she had done this. He cut the tapes and re-tied them in another way; he tied both hands together so that she could lay them in her lap; he then attached her arms to the chair on either side, so that she could only move them a little way; then replaced the metal chain which fastened her to the chair.

After this we still waited, and for a time nothing happened. We were told to break the circle and let her walk up and down the room. After this she was again tied into the chair. Then I became conscious of a cool feeling on my hands, and others noticed the same sensation; shortly after the curtains over the cabinet began to move, and presently a figure opened the curtains and showed herself, draped in white from head to foot. This figure showed herself several times, but only for a moment each time; then a woman's voice from the cabinet complained: 'Il y a beaucoup de lumière' ('there is much light'). Again and again this was repeated. This was Mrs. Corner's control, the Frenchwoman, 'Marie'.

I expressed my satisfaction at seeing her. 'Nous sommes très contents, Marie,' I said; but she replied that she was not 'contente', that the light was too strong; she could not get on. Occasionally she said: 'Don't be so intent on the cabinet. Talk to each other, and don't worry me'.

We were not conscious that we were 'worrying' her, but I suppose our anxiety for results made her feel anxious too, and hindered her efforts. Once when the old captain, Mrs. Corner's other control, was talking she exclaimed, 'Tais-toi!'

Presently a voice from the cabinet said, 'You may come into the cabinet just to see that I am not complaining for nothing'. One of our circle went behind the curtain whence 'Marie' had so recently shown herself, and he observed that a good deal of light penetrated. Mrs. Corner was, of course, still firmly tied into her chair, and it was quite obvious that the figure in white which had appeared was not — and could not have been — Mrs. Corner. The old captain said, 'The object of a cabinet is to keep out the light', and presently a

voice suggested that we should break up the circle and re-arrange the lamp; so we opened the cabinet and told Mrs. Corner what we had been instructed to do.

I assisted in the re-arrangement of the lamp so as to exclude the yellow rays and specially to protect the *cabinet* from these rays; but the light remained very fairly good. The medium was then tied up again, and 'Marie' again appeared several times; and once she threw out toward us her skirt of white drapery, exclaiming 'Voila!' Her head was draped because, she said, the power was not sufficient to enable her to completely materialise, but her face was visible; another little figure appeared for a moment. 'Marie's' hand appeared outside the curtain more than once.

The results as compared with other seances were not very good; but in view of the fact that what occurred happened in our own house with only our own friends present, the phenomena were peculiarly interesting to me from an evidential standpoint.

The conversation which followed I also noted down and it may be worth while to record it here. This, of course, can have no evidential value. The voice that spoke issued from behind the curtains of the cabinet. It was usually a man's voice — the rather rough voice of 'the captain'. He spoke with affection of the medium; he said that she had 'helped him up', that it had been so hard to realise that he was what we call 'dead'. 'You are never dead', he said. It was difficult for him to realise that he had passed through the change because he felt as alive as before, and he kept on trying to touch things and could not do so. 'I was not kind at first', he said, referring to his first control of the medium.

Someone remarked on the similarity which often exists between a medium and the controls. 'I have again and again said that it is like turning jelly out of a mould', remarked the old captain's voice behind the curtain. He said that he often found when he had spoken through the medium that he had said what he did not mean to say. (This seems to suggest a dream-like condition.) We remarked on the difficulty those on the other side experience when trying to explain to us their conditions and the old captain broke in with, 'It is not only that, but we forget a great deal concerning our other life when we are taking on earth conditions'. 'Marie' remarked that she was tired when she tried to materialise and she slept a good deal. (Perhaps this 'sleep' makes them oblivious of their experience when controlling a medium. It is conceivable that they awaken to their normal spirit conditions and forget these brief material interludes as we forget our dreams). She spoke of materialising as her 'work' and as if she were happy to be able to do it and regretful when she did not get an opportunity.

There was something very natural and human about the old captain. He asked us to take care of the medium; then he closed the seance with the salutation, 'God Bless you all — God bless you *all*. Jews, Catholics and all of you'. (Our visitors were Jews.)

In a later note in *Light*,¹ Miss Dallas says that at a seance (possibly not the same one) with Florence 'hands were thrust out from behind the curtain, and sometimes the hand resembled her own. Of course she was securely tied. She always insisted on being so. When my brother-in-law, Dr. Colles, was fastening her arms to the chair in which she sat, on one occasion, she pointed out to him that the attachment was not secure enough; that it might be possible for her to escape from it. Those who may doubt her honesty cannot have had any real acquaintance with her'.

A further interesting passage in Miss Dallas's note is as follows:

I sent her my little book, 'Objections to Spiritualism Answered', and shortly before her death she referred to the chapter on the danger of excessive use of stimulants. She said that at the houses where she held sittings, often the hostess would press stimulants on her, and she thought that at the time the stimulant might help the phenomena, and therefore it was a temptation to take it, but, she added, 'It does you no real good. I do not take it now.' That was during her last illness.

Since such a diversity of sitters attended Florence's seances in her final period there may well be further surviving accounts which we have not been successful in tracing. It appears, for example, that Dr Abraham Wallace (at one time an S.P.R. Council member) claimed to have had a very successful sitting with Florence: Sir Oliver Lodge appeared to think this of importance, and in a letter to Wallace dated September 5, 1923 (preserved in the Britten Memorial Library) Lodge urged him to publish more particulars. He adds: 'I myself have never seen more than faces and hands and those indistinctly; but then I have never sat with a first-class materializing medium, such as Mrs. Corner must have been at one time.'

It would appear, overall, that there is enough evidence to leave one puzzled regarding Florence's last period, but that it is certainly not of a quality adequate to justify a positive verdict. It is much to be hoped that there will come to light further material on these very numerous sittings held under such diverse conditions.

8. CROOKES AND MRS FAY

Mrs Annie Eva Fay was an American medium whose speciality was the allegedly paranormal movement of objects remote from her while she herself was, ostensibly, fastened to her chair. She gave stage performances in London during most of 1874 which,

¹ *Light*, August 28, 1926, p. 405.

though purporting to be of mediumistic origin, were advertised by bills very like those announcing conjuring performances.¹ As James Burns (an active Spiritualist and editor of *The Medium and Daybreak*) said:²

The genuineness of Mrs. Fay's mediumship has been widely questioned — as indeed, has been the probity of every other medium — more particularly because she permitted herself to be advertised and exhibited in showman fashion. The phenomena occur at her seances with such pre-arranged regularity, that many cannot escape the suspicion that the experiments are a series of tricks, inscrutable to the public, but capable of imitation by experts.* Others again boast that they can permit themselves to be tied and then perform 'all her tricks'. At the present moment the showman who worked her seances at Hanover Square is now imitating her manifestations by the reproduction of the old advertisement and the exhibition of a 'phenomenon' in the very unspiritual figure of a young lady in tights! Looked at from all sides, the genuineness of Mrs. Fay's mediumship involved a most important issue, the relations of which may be easily filled in by the reader, and to set all doubts at rest on the matter Mr. Crookes's experiments were successfully directed.

* Those accustomed to investigate with well-developed mediums, are favoured with an almost equal certainty and regularity of the phenomena. The objections raised against mediums are often unnecessary, and sometimes malicious. (Burns's footnote.)

Mrs Fay's mediumship would certainly be forgotten today were it not for Crookes's remarkable tests. Before discussing these, it will be of interest to consider some of the events leading up to them.

Unpublished letters of Frederick W. H. Myers, Lord Rayleigh and Henry Sidgwick make it clear that, late in 1874, a scheme was being canvassed for an extensive investigation of Mrs Fay's mediumship. This was to be carried out by a team consisting of Myers, Crookes, Sidgwick, Rayleigh, and probably Edmund Gurney. Such an undertaking would doubtless have made psychic history!

According to Myers's unpublished diary, his first sitting with Mrs Fay was in June 1874, apparently in company with Sidgwick. Further sittings, sometimes with Crookes present, are recorded for November and December 1874 and January 1875. The earliest mention we have seen of the projected formal investigation is in a letter from Rayleigh to Myers dated November 23, 1874. Myers had evidently proposed that Mrs Fay be paid three or four hundred

¹ For a reproduction of a bill announcing Mrs Fay's performance in 1879, see John W. Truesdell's *The Bottom Facts Concerning the Science of Spiritualism* . . . , G. W. Carleton, New York, 1884.

² *The Medium and Daybreak*, March 12, 1875, p. 161.

pounds for a lengthy series of sittings, and Rayleigh, while he felt that this sum 'might be well spent in getting a really satisfactory demonstration of Spiritualism', had doubts about expending so much money merely 'on the chance of doing so'. He says:

I do not know what evidence you or Mr. Crookes may have of Mrs. Fay's genuineness, and so am writing rather in the dark but I should not consider any number of seances like one we had in Carlton Gardens worth much. I should attach great importance to the terms of the arrangement that it may be possible to make, e.g. whether Mr. Fay is to be eliminated and the general control to be in our hands.

Some sort of agreement was apparently reached with the medium. In a letter to Sidgwick dated November 26, 1874 Myers writes of Mrs Fay (by then he was referring to her as 'Eva'):

In her engagement with us it is plainly understood that she is to submit to every conceivable test. The moral evidences of her candour constantly increase. Each accession of intimacy with her leads me to an increased respect for her uprightness, courage and kindness.

In the same letter, Myers mentions Eva's opinion that Sidgwick was a bad sitter.¹ She objected to his fidgetiness, and to his being dissatisfied with precautions after they had been taken. Presumably this had determined Sidgwick not to sit further with the lady. In an undated letter² to Myers he writes:

On reflection, I think I should like to cut off the possibility (which we left remote and indefinite) of my ever joining in the Fay business. This is on various grounds, which it wd take long to explain with proper delicacy — but I will when we meet if I can. Of course I may change my mind; but at present I feel disposed to leave Mrs. F. to you and Crookes — bidding her *πολλὰ χαίρων* [many farewells] as medium. As a friend of yours she will of course always claim my kind regards & services. Probably in a few years she will come to regret her treatment of One [evidently Sidgwick!] whose sacrifices in the cause of Humanity will then have hurried him to a premature grave — but you need not agitate her mind by these gloomy images.

. . . You must concentrate your resources on Mrs. Fay. The more Crookes gives himself the airs of tyranny, the more needful it is that the Commons — if you will not mind being regarded momentarily as a Commons — should have the power of the Purse.

¹ In an undated ms. preserved by the Lodge family, Crookes remarks: 'There are some people so constituted that nothing psychic will take place in their presence. Prof. Sidgwick was one. In spite of repeated trials he never witnessed anything.'

² This and Sidgwick's subsequent letters are preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

In reply to this, in a letter dated December 3, 1874, Myers remarks:

Alright about your not joining Crookes and me if indeed we do aught with Eva this winter. But pledge not yourself *never* to witness her revelations, for I hope that that sweet and noble one may be permitted to remain yet some 30 or 40 years in the form, and may under God's providence be a leading agent in bringing Life and Immortality to light.

... I do not fear Crookes. The lion will not let himself be robbed of his cub, — nor the cub of his lion.

In a further letter to Sidgwick dated December 9, 1874, Myers revealed that:

Moses has seen Eva's 'Willy' doing the manifestations for her, — that is to say another dupe bears witness to the juggler who cannot appreciate Moralists. (This is sarcasm of the lightest kind.) There is a crisis in the affairs of Eva. I know not what will happen, but will write again. ... You need not tell Rayleigh about Mr. Fay's past crimes, as nobody proposes that *he* should have anything to do with our investigation, and Eva only told me privily, and would not like it spread, for *his* sake.

Sidgwick, in his reply (dated 'Tuesday') writes:

... I shall perhaps not come to town on *Monday* as Rayleigh wants me to go to Terling — or perhaps I shall go down to him for a night during the week. He is rather inclined to go in for the Fay business, I think. I shall urge him as strongly as I can. I think however I ought to let him know what you told me about the Colonel's 'record' — but that as you decide.

Myers's proposal not to tell Rayleigh about an obviously very material circumstance, and Sidgwick's willingness to acquiesce in this course of action, may be thought to constitute somewhat disingenuous treatment of a colleague, particularly in view of the sum of money involved, then a very substantial one. But it is sadly clear that there was a certain absence of trust between the collaborators. Besides Sidgwick's comment regarding Crookes's 'airs of tyranny' in the letter quoted above, he remarks in another letter to Myers:

... but in a general way it seemed to be possible that Crookes was seeing his way to funds from other quarters and would not be sorry for an excuse to break with you; in order to gain independence and secure his scientific priority.

For reasons that are not clear the proposed collaborative investigation of Eva Fay never came to anything. There exists an

interesting letter on this subject from Rayleigh to Myers, written in January 1875. We quote it since it bears on Crookes's attitude towards the mediums he worked with. By then it would seem that Crookes had largely taken over the investigation of Mrs Fay.

Terling Place,
Witham, Essex.
15th Jan. 1875.

Dear Myers,

I scarcely see my way to asking Mrs. Fay here again without a better explanation of her extraordinary conduct, but I have written to Gurney, and perhaps something may still be arranged.

I received an odd letter from Crookes saying that an explanation was certainly due to me from Mrs. Fay, but not giving it, as he said he did not wish to put anything upon paper upon this subject. If I could give him an interview he had no doubt he could satisfy me that no other course was open to Mrs. Fay. I do not feel much disposed to recognise him in the matter at all.

* * *

I must confess all these difficulties shake the limited belief that I had arrived at — probably more than is reasonable. Crookes' behaviour seems to me so odd that I cannot help attaching less value to his testimony on which I had mainly relied. What was it to him whether I was a believer or not? Lady Rayleigh reminds me (what had passed out of my mind) that Mrs. Jencken told us that Crookes always tried to prevent her giving a seance without him, and even urged her to break off definite engagements; and he evidently behaved very oddly in the matter of her marriage, so that Mr. J. will not meet him.

I am the more disappointed with Crookes because my first impression of him was favourable.

Wishing you all success,
Yours very truly,
RAYLEIGH.

We have not been able to discover what were the grounds for Lord Rayleigh's dissatisfaction, but some understanding must have been reached, since a month later, Rayleigh attended at least one of Crookes's electrical tests, which we shall discuss later in this section.

We conclude this account of the events that preceded Crookes's tests with a passage from a letter by Myers to Sir Oliver Lodge, dated March 15, 1892. He writes:

My dear Lodge,

I hope indeed that Crookes may be President of Brit. Assn. in 1894. I do not know any ground on which his honesty could possibly be

doubted, unless it were with regard to his getting successful experiments with Mrs. Fay, who was an undoubted cheat. But the electrical experiment — which is well known — was of so plain a character, and the witnesses so capable of judging of it (Lord Rayleigh etc.), that it seems absurd to ground any charge against Crookes on that incident.

Another incident happened in a sitting with Crookes, Mrs. Fay, Edmund Gurney and myself, which did lead E.G. to entertain doubts as to whether Crookes had not pushed a pleasantry to a point of unjustifiable mystification. But I am now convinced that the incident is to be otherwise interpreted. It was thus. We were sitting in pitch darkness, and Crookes was holding Mrs. Fay's hands. Suddenly a book which was on Mrs. Fay's knee was thrown with great violence at E.G., whom Mrs. Fay disliked. This fact — occurring with a person who, whether medium or no, was certainly also a cheat, — seemed to show that Mrs. Fay's hands had been loose; and E.G., firstly from Crookes's manner, supposed that Crookes had loosed her hands, as a joke with her, enabling her to throw the book.

Knowing Crookes better now, I perceive that the manner which influenced E.G. was only a specimen of the manner which Crookes, deliberately and very successfully, has thought it best to adopt, in order to set 'mediums' at ease. I still think that Mrs. Fay herself threw the book; but I do not think that Crookes was aware that she was for the moment free. I think, in fact, that he was not giving his mind to holding her; and that she got one hand loose, as mediums often do with less eminent sitters. She was extremely adroit. There is no need to bring this old story up, *unless* you think that any version of it is current as a source of distrust of Crookes. E.G. did mention it to various people: considering that it had been, as I say, an unfair mystification on Crookes' part — which I do *not* think it was.

We shall mention this incident again in our final section.

During February 1875 (in the period, it is interesting to notice, during which Florence Corner's 'Leila' sittings were under vigorous way), Crookes conducted a series of electrical tests with Mrs Fay in his own house. Four are recorded: as usual, the wholesale destruction of documents that seems to have gone on through the years leaves us with no way of knowing whether there were more.

The four known sessions took place on the 5th, 6th, 19th, and 25th of February. One, probably that of the 6th, was attended by Lord Rayleigh. Two long accounts of the third session exist, one by Crookes himself (*The Spiritualist*, March 12, 1875, p. 126 *et seq.*) and one by Serjeant Cox (*The Mechanism of Man*, Vol. 2, Longman, London, 1879, p. 446 *et seq.*). The fourth sitting is described at considerable length by James Burns in *The Medium & Daybreak*, March 12, 1875, pp. 161 *et seq.*

We shall quote Crookes's account of this important experiment (which, as Count Perovsky Petrovo-Solovovo said, 'has always been regarded as a most conclusive one, even by those who — like myself — do not wish to press any incidents in the career of so suspicious a medium as evidentially cogent' — *S.P.R. Journal*, Vol. IX, p. 11, Jan. 1899). Missing, as so often from Crookes's reports are the names of most of the sitters. Cox gives them as Crookes, Galton,¹ Huggins,¹ Ionides and Cox himself, certainly a distinguished company! Harrison was also present, though Cox somehow overlooks this.

A SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION OF MRS. FAY'S MEDIUMSHIP.²

by William Crookes, F.R.S. Editor of the
'QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE'.

About a year ago Mrs. Annie Eva Fay came to this country from the United States, with a good reputation as a medium for the production of physical phenomena.

It appeared to me that the means first devised by Mr. Varley to test the mediumship of Miss Cook, and which was attended with such satisfactory results in her case, as already recorded by him in *The Spiritualist*,³ would be the best to demonstrate whether the phenomena which took place in the presence of Mrs. Fay were produced by sleight-of-hand or were genuine. Experience has shown that the best conditions for the production of the most striking phenomena in Mrs. Fay's mediumship are, that she should be isolated from the other persons present, and in darkness; therefore, in order to get manifestations under test conditions, it was necessary that the medium should be so tied that she could not be freed by herself or by any other power without the knowledge of the observers. Mrs. Fay is usually tied with tapes or string; I proposed to tie her with a current of electricity. This method has the advantage of *absolute certainty*, since, if the medium has her hands or body removed from the wires, in a state of trance or otherwise, the galvanometer outside lets the spectators know the moment that the circuit is broken. On the other hand, if the wires should be joined together so that the current can still pass, the effect is quite as surely made evident by the galvanometer.

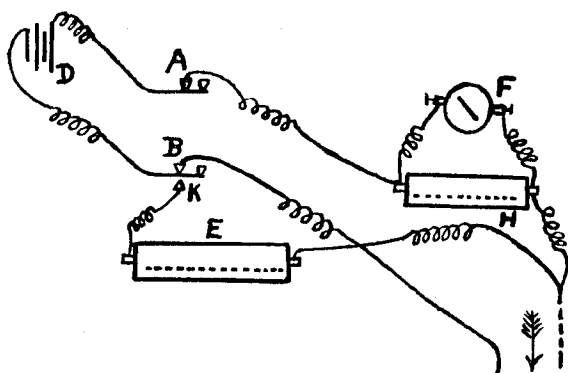
¹ Sir Francis Galton and Sir William Huggins were both Fellows of the Royal Society at that time, and Huggins was later President.

² *The Spiritualist*, March 12, 1875, pp. 126-8.

³ Crookes's enthusiastic reference to the Varley test should be considered in relation to Trevor Hall's suggestion that Crookes wished to 'draw a veil' over Varley's experiments (*The Spiritualists*, p. 51).

On Friday evening, Feb. 19th, Mrs. Fay came to my house alone, to submit to these tests, in the presence of several well-known scientific men. She entered the drawing-room, and conversed with us for about a quarter of an hour, after which my friends went down stairs to examine the electrical apparatus and my library, which was to be used as the dark room. They examined the cupboards and opened the desks. They put strips of paper over the fastenings of the window shutters, and sealed them with their signet rings. They also sealed up, in a similar manner, the second door of the library, which opens into a passage. The other door opens from the library into my laboratory, in which the experimentalists remained during the tests; a curtain, consequently, was suspended over this door, to place the library in comparative darkness and to admit of rapid and easy passage to and fro.

The accompanying cut shows the arrangement of the apparatus.



D, battery.

F, galvanometer.

H, shunt to cut off more or less of the current in order to regulate the deflection of the galvanometer.

E, box of resistance coils.

A and B, keys to make and break contact.

(A) is always closed, and used only to correct or check zero.

(B) pressed down to K, puts the resistance coils in place of the medium.

The two wires on each side of the arrow go to the medium.

The medium takes hold of two handles, attached to the wires below the arrow, and thus completes the circuit, and causes the light from the galvanometer to be deflected on the scale. The shunt is now adjusted, the object being to distribute the current between the galvanometer and the shunt so as to cause a convenient deflection of the former. Any movement of the medium is now seen by a variation of the position of the spot of light. If the wires or handles are short circuited in any way the spot of light flies off the scale; if, on the other hand, contact is broken by the medium leaving go, the light immediately drops to zero.

To take the resistance of the medium, the key, B, is pressed down, which places the resistance coils in the circuit instead of the medium. Pegs are then taken out till the deflection on the galvanometer is equal to that produced by the medium; the resistances are then equal both of the medium and coils, and the figures are read off on the latter.

The reflecting galvanometer with resistance coil and shunt, were placed close against the wall in the laboratory by the side of the curtain, and two short pieces of very thick wire ran through the wall, and were securely soldered to two brass handles on the other side; these handles were to be held by Mrs. Fay whose body thus completed the electrical circuit, and gave me a deflection on the galvanometer varying with her electrical resistance. The brass handles were tightly covered with two pieces of linen soaked in salt and water. Before commencing the experiments, Mrs. Fay soaked her hands in salt and water, and on then taking hold of the handles, I have always found the amount of deflection to be very steady, owing to the large amount of conducting surface exposed to contact with the hands. When she seized the terminals, the exact amount of deflection due to the resistance of her body was given by the galvanometer; if she caused the handles to touch each other the deflection was so great as to cause the light to fly wildly off the scale; if she ceased to hold the handles for an instant the ray of light came to zero; if she had attempted to substitute anything besides her body to establish partial contact between the two handles, the great oscillations of the luminous index, which would have taken place while it was being done would at once have exposed her after which the chances would have been infinite against its producing the right amount of deflection.

My friends inspected these arrangements, and two of them, well-known fellows of the Royal Society, tried what could be done by connecting the two terminals with a damp handkerchief. By a series of careful adjustments, between each of which they had to ask me what amount of deflection had thus been produced upon the galvanometer outside, they in time obtained an amount of resistance the same as that of a human body; but to effect this would have been impossible without information as to the indications given by the galvanometer outside, and all this time the violent oscillations of the ray of light showed that they were trying to make a new contact by tricks of some kind. At the suggestion of one of them, however, and to obviate this barely possible source of error, the brass handles were then nailed so far apart, that he expressed himself satisfied that neither he nor anybody else could repeat the experiment with the handkerchief which he had just exhibited.

Mrs. Fay was then invited down into the library; she took her seat in a chair before the brass handles, and the gaslights in the library were then reduced to one, which was turned low. We noted the distance from her of several prominent articles. A musical box was lying on my desk at a distance of about four feet from her; a violin lay upon the table at a distance of about eight feet; and my library

ladder rested against the book shelves at a distance from her of about twelve feet. We then asked her to moisten her hands with salt solution, and then seize the terminals. This she did, and at once a deflection was produced upon the galvanometer scale due to the resistance of her body; we then left the library and entered the laboratory, which was illuminated by gas sufficiently for us to see everything distinctly.

We commenced the tests at 8.55 p.m.; the deflection by the galvanometer was 211° , and the resistance of Mrs. Fay's body, 6,600 British Association units. At 8.56 the deflection was 214° , and at this moment a hand-bell began to ring in the library. At 8.57 the deflection was 215° . A hand came out of the cabinet on the side farthest from Mrs. Fay.

It should be clearly understood that I was on one side of the wall with the galvanometer, that Mrs. Fay was on the opposite side holding the handles, soldered to pieces of wire, so secured that she could not move her hands or the handles an inch to the right or left, and that under these conditions, a hand came out from the farthest side of the curtained door alongside us, at a distance of three feet from the brass handles, and all within two minutes after we had left the room.

At 8.58 the deflection was 208° ; at 8.59 it was 215° , and at this moment a hand came out at the further side of the curtain, and handed a copy of *The Spiritualist* newspaper to Mr. Harrison.

At 9 o'clock the deflection was 209° ; at this moment a hand was again seen to come out and hand Serjeant Cox a copy of his book entitled *What am I?* At 9.1 the deflection was 209° , the hand appeared again, and gave a little book on *Spectrum Analysis* to its author, who was one of the observers.

At 9.2 the deflection was 214° ; a hand was again visible and gave to a well-known traveller who was present a book entitled *Art of Travel*.

At 9.3, the hand threw a box of cigarettes at another gentleman who was present, and who was known to be partial to the fragrant weed. I could have been positive that that box of cigarettes was in a locked drawer in my desk when Mrs. Fay entered the room.

At 9.4 the deflection was 213° . I again measured the resistance of Mrs. Fay's body, and it was then 6,500 British Association units. At this moment a small ornamented clock, which had been standing on the mantle-piece five feet from the medium, was handed out.

At 9.4½, the deflection was 210° ; Serjeant Cox, and some of the other observers, said that they saw a full human form standing at the opening of the curtain.

At 9.5, the circuit was seen to be suddenly broken. I entered the library instantly, followed by the others, and found that Mrs. Fay had fainted, or was entranced. She was lying back in the chair senseless, but revived in the course of half an hour. Thus this remarkable seance had lasted for exactly 10 minutes.

A piece of old china, in the shape of a plate, was found lying upon the top of my writing-desk in the library; it was not there before the

experiments began. In my drawing-room upstairs there is a moulding all round the wall, near the ceiling, and about eight feet from the ground; resting upon this moulding are several pieces of old china, including some small plates. Mrs. Fay had been in the drawing-room for perhaps an hour before the seance began, but she was not there except in the presence of several witnesses; the room was well lighted, and had she mounted a chair to reach one of the plates near the ceiling, of course every one must have seen it. The plates had been on those mouldings for weeks without being moved, for no member of my family had occasion to touch them; and one of the gentlemen present said he was sure that the plate was not on the desk when the experiments commenced, because he looked at the top of the desk with the intention of placing something on it, which he wished to put out of the way. Many similar cases of the carriage of solid objects from one place to another by abnormal means are on record in Spiritualistic literature.

Before Mrs. Fay came to the house that evening, she only knew the names of two of the guests who would be present, but during the evening the intelligence at work displayed an unusual amount of knowledge about the sitters and the labours of their lives. The book on *Spectrum Analysis* was one with no letters on the back, yet it was removed from its place and handed to its author. Although I know generally the position of the books in my library, I certainly could not find them in the dark, and I have no reason for supposing that Mrs. Fay knew anything about such a book being in existence, or in my library, or that it was written by the particular person present.

On previous occasions I had applied an electrical test to Mrs. Fay's manifestations. On 5th of February last we had a *seance* which commenced at 9.15 p.m. The deflection when she took hold of the handles was 260° ; it oscillated — 266° , 190° , 220° , 240° , then remained steady at 237° ; the medium's resistance at 920^1 was 5,800 British Association units. Knockings were heard at 9.28, when the deflection was oscillating between 215° and 245° .

At 9.30, the light was tolerably steady at 230° ; the resistance was 5,900. A great deal of rapping was now heard, apparently on the door close to the medium, but there was no movement of the light, which proved Mrs. Fay's hands to be perfectly still.

At 9.31 the deflection was 234° . The medium was then heard to sigh and sob. The spot of light was steady at 233° , although several instruments were now playing at the same time. Movements were then heard in the room; several articles were thrown into the laboratory through the opening of the curtain; the violin was given to me by a visible hand, which was seen also by the others in the room. All this time the luminous index was very steady, which proved that the medium was still while these things were occurring. At 9.34 the light was steady at 236° , and the zero was correct. At 9.37

¹ Evidently a misprint, either for 220° or possibly for 9.20.

we could hear the musical box being wound up, the light still keeping steady. At 9.38 the deflection was 238° . At 9.39 the medium broke contact by dropping the handles. She was just able to say, 'So tired of holding these things'. Then she was entranced, but recovered in a short time.

On Saturday, Feb. 6th, another experimental *seance* was held at my house. It was got up somewhat hurriedly, for the benefit of an eminent F.R.S., who was unable to attend the previous evening. Mrs. Fay was the medium. A few extra precautions were taken. The library was thoroughly searched, the doors and windows were closed and strips of paper was gummed over them. These pieces of paper were then sealed over with a ring belonging to a lady present; after which the electrical test was applied, just as upon the night before. Almost the same things took place, with the same results, namely our not being able to detect the slightest movement on the part of the medium. My desk, which fastens with a Bramah lock, was shut carefully just before the *seance*, yet it was found open after the *seance* was over. This was a very short one. It commenced at 9.15 and ended at 9.30 p.m.

At first I always give new mediums who come to me their own conditions; for while I do not know what the phenomena may be, I am not in a position to suggest tests, nor, possibly, should I be able to get them before the mediums have confidence in me and that I will not play them any tricks, after which they have always shown a desire to help me as much as they can. All manifestations depend upon delicate conditions intimately connected with the nervous state of the sensitives, and most manifestations are checked when anything takes place to annoy them.

According to Burns's account¹ (approved by Crookes), the *seance* of February 25 followed a similar course. He describes an additional effect not mentioned by Crookes.

The light on the scale appeared to stand steady all the time, but careful observation determined that it had moved over one division, a space smaller than the degree on a thermometer, and close attention on the part of experienced observers revealed the fact that a gentle pulsation was noticeable in the streak of light, due to Mrs. Fay's breathing.

If this were a genuine effect it would confirm beyond doubt that, at the very least, some human being was in the circuit. It is of course well-known that under difficult conditions of observation it is possible for an apparent oscillation of this sort to appear as an optical illusion. We hope to decide the matter experimentally in due course.

Burns's report adds further details concerning the physical

¹ *The Medium and Daybreak*, March 12, 1875, p. 161.

surroundings. He gives a plan of Crookes's library, and explains the precautions taken to ensure that no unaccounted-for person could enter the library.

Burns was much impressed by the thoroughness of Crookes's preparations. He writes:

The library was minutely examined and prepared for the *seance*. Had Mr. Crookes used such precautions in the house of the most ardent Spiritualist he would have possibly subjected himself to some little umbrage for so doing. Every corner was looked into. The fastenings of the window-shutters were shown, the door into the hall was locked and sealed with Mr. Bergheim's seal. These precautions were not undertaken with the view of ridiculing the test-conditions usually imposed at *seances*, but in the most serious and conscientious manner to leave no opening unclosed whereby suspicions as to the nature of the phenomena might enter. The windows would have been sealed also, but after much expostulation from his guests, Mr. Crookes ultimately gave way, but from the remains of wax and paper we could see that the shutters had been sealed on previous occasions. The windows overlook a front garden and wide area, separated from the busy thoroughfare by a heavy iron railing, so that an entrance by the windows would be not only a difficult feat, but highly dangerous, as the experimenter might find himself in the hands of the police.

To our knowledge, only two methods have been proposed whereby the medium could have cheated. Podmore, in *Modern Spiritualism*, Vol. 2, Methuen, London, 1902, p. 158, remarks:

From this account [i.e. that of James Burns] it would not appear that any precautions were taken to ensure that Mrs. Fay's hands were actually in the circuit; if a resistance coil were attached to the handles, it would only have been necessary for the medium in the dim light to approach her hands close to them during Mr. Crookes' momentary inspection. To detect trickery of the kind probably practised, nothing less than a careful inspection in full light would have sufficed.

If Crookes were careless almost to the point of imbecility, this explanation could account for the test attended by Burns, as the latter describes it. But, unless we are prepared to believe that Podmore had to have a 'natural' explanation at all costs, it is not clear why he confined his attention to the Burns sitting.¹ In the sitting described by Crookes, two Fellows of the Royal Society, both experienced experimenters and one, at least, as we know from his earlier letters on the Fox phenomena (see p. 41), very

¹ Podmore rather tended towards 'easy' explanations and neglect of inconvenient evidence. Cf. Father Thurston's analysis of Podmore's treatment of D. D. Home's accordion tests: *The Church and Spiritualism*, Milwaukee, 1933, Chapter IX, and especially p. 173.

much on the look-out for trickery, were still present in the library with Crookes when Mrs Fay grasped the handles, and had spent the preceding minutes searching for a possible method of fraud. Podmore's suggestion cannot be ruled out as an absolute impossibility but, like so many such suggestions it postulates a degree of incompetence on the part of the experimenters that seems almost more incredible than the paranormal effects described. As Crookes said, on another occasion:

Will not my critics give me credit for the possession of some amount of common sense? And can they not imagine that obvious precautions which occur to them as soon as they sit down to pick holes in my experiments, are not unlikely to have also occurred to me in the course of prolonged and patient investigation?

Houdini had an alternative explanation for the electrical test. In *A Magician Among the Spirits* (Harper, New York, 1924, p. 204), he reports an alleged conversation with Mrs Fay.

'She told me', he says, 'that when Maskelyne, the magician, came out with an exposé of her work she was forced to resort to strategy. Going to the home of Professor Crookes, she threw herself on his mercy and gave a series of special tests. With flashing eyes she told of taking advantage of him. It appears that she had but one chance in the world to get by the galvanometer* but by some stroke of luck for her and an evil chance for Professor Crookes, the electric light went out for a second at the theatre at which she was performing and she availed herself of the opportunity to fool him.'

* The 'galvanometer' is an instrument used to control the medium. It is an electric device provided with a dial and two handles, so constructed that if the medium were to let go of either handle the contact would be broken and the dial fail to register. The medium in fooling the sitter simply placed one of the handles on the bare flesh under her knee and gripping it there with her leg kept the circuit intact and left one hand free to produce 'spirits'. (Houdini's footnote.)

The remark about the electric light and the theatre is, of course, nonsense, and makes one doubt that the conversation took place. The suggestion that the medium placed one electrode under her knee is ingenious, and might apply to the earlier sittings if she were not kept under observation up to the moment when she grasped the handles. But if this were the explanation, she would have been very disconcerted, during Crookes's sitting of February 19, 1875, when she found the handles nailed down, and the F.R.S.'s present might have been expected to have viewed her consequent contortions with considerable interest!

In his account, Crookes reported that Serjeant Cox, and others,

said at 9.4½ p.m. that they saw a full human form at the opening of the curtain. In the *Spiritualist* for March 26, 1875 (p. 151), Cox himself changes the time of this occurrence to 9.00 p.m., the moment when, according to Crookes, Cox had been handed through the curtain aperture a copy of his book *What am I?* He also asserted that the form was dressed in the same manner as the medium. Four years later, he remembered more. Besides seeing the standing form, he 'saw another form, like that we had left upon the seat, grasping the handles, still there, still in the same posture, but too much in shadow to enable me to note the dress'. His conclusion, both at the time of the sitting and later, was that the standing figure was Mrs Fay's entranced body, and the sitting figure her 'spirit form'. It is not completely clear why he wished matters to be that way round, except that he had difficulty in envisaging a materialized facsimile dress.

Summarizing, there seems no obvious way whereby Mrs Fay, unaided, could have evaded the precautions under the conditions described. Cox's observation, for what it is worth, might suggest a confederate. But considering the elaborate searching and sealing (also described independently by Burns) and the fact that these were Crookes's premises, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that if the phenomena were fraudulent, Crookes himself would have had to be in charge of the conspiracy — a conspiracy, one must bear in mind, directed, among others, against three fellow scientists of a calibre equal to or exceeding his own. On the other hand, if the phenomena were genuine, we have here yet another case of a medium producing for Crookes prodigies which were not, apparently, so readily on tap for contemporary investigators and certainly have no parallel today.

Crookes, having once declared his belief in the powers of a particular medium, never retracted. For that matter, the mediums he sponsored never, at any rate publicly, admitted to having deceived him. We shall quote two letters connected with the Fay investigation that illustrate these points. One,¹ from Crookes to Mr R. Cooper of Boston, Massachusetts, was written nine months or so after the electrical tests. It reads as follows:

Dear Sir,

In reply to your favour of Oct. 25th, which I have received this morning, I beg to state that *no one* has any authority from me to state that I have any doubts of Mrs. Fay's mediumship. The published accounts of the test seances which took place at my house are the best evidence which I can give of my belief in Mrs. Fay's powers. I should be sorry to find that any such rumours as you mention

¹ *The Spiritualist*, December 21, 1877, p. 293.

should injure Mrs. Fay, whom I always found most ready to submit to any conditions I thought fit to propose.

Believe me, very truly yours,

William Crookes.

20 Mornington Road,

London, N.W. Nov. 8th, 1875.

The other letter we wish to quote, written by Mrs Fay to the Editor of the American Spiritualist journal *The Banner of Light*, is of additional interest in view of rumours circulated by professional magicians that this lady had boasted of having tricked Crookes.¹ Dr Carpenter, an old enemy of Crookes,² had launched a fresh attack in *Nature*, based on Crookes's sponsorship of Mrs Fay. It appears that Crookes, whose skill in the conduct of acrimonious controversy was of a high order, had no great difficulty in repelling the attack.³ Dr Carpenter's allegations provoked the letter from Mrs Fay to the *Banner of Light*⁴ with which we conclude this section.

I wish to state a few facts in reference to an article in your paper of Dec. 8th referring to myself, in a letter of Mr. Crookes on Dr. Carpenter's attack.

First, it is untrue that Mr. Crookes gave me a letter speaking of the spiritualistic nature of my manifestations, and referring to Fellows of the Royal Society. The only letter, to my knowledge, that Mr. Crookes ever wrote regarding my mediumship (with the exception of the one written to Mr. Cooper) appeared in the London *Daily Telegraph*, and other journals, March 11th, 1875.⁵

Second, in reply to Dr. Carpenter's statement that an offer was made by my managers in May, 1875, of an equivalent sum of money for me to 'expose the whole affair', I will now say to Dr. Carpenter, as I did to my managers, *I have nothing to expose*.

I am in receipt of a letter, dated November 18th, 1877, asking me if I will fix a price to visit England under the title of an 'Exposee', and show how I am supposed to have hoodwinked members of the Royal Society.

¹ See Houdini's statement quoted above. In a letter (preserved in the Society's archives) from W. Morton, Maskelyne's manager, to 'Dr. Mr. Barrett', dated September 2, 1876, there is the sentence: 'We know that Mr. Crookes was swindled (not robbed but taken in) by Miss [sic] Fay, and the lady (?) subsequently made a boast of it.'

² Cf. Crookes's *Researches*, 1874, pp. 45-80.

³ For further background information see Fournier d'Albe's *The Life of Sir William Crookes*, pp. 272-3.

⁴ Reproduced in *The Spiritualist*, January 4, 1878, p. 11.

⁵ Mrs Fay is slightly confused here. What appeared in various newspapers (including the *Daily Telegraph*) during this period, were summaries of Crookes's report in *The Spiritualist*, which we have reproduced. There is no letter by Crookes in the *Daily Telegraph* on or around the date mentioned.

My reply was as follows:—

'As poor as I am, and as clever as I am supposed to be by Dr. Carpenter and others, I am obliged to decline your tempting proposition to replenish my exchequer by attempting impossibilities. I sincerely hope to be able to maintain myself and child in a more honourable occupation'.

Akron, Ohio, December 10th, 1877.

Annie Eva Fay.

9. CROOKES AND MISS SHOWERS

Miss Rosina Showers,¹ unlike most of the other prominent mediums of the period, was a strictly 'private' medium, charging no fee and giving sittings only to selected people. Her principal spirit form was known as 'Florence Maple'. In 1874, when she first encountered Crookes, she was a girl of seventeen, the only daughter of Major-General Charles Lionel Showers, an Indian Army Officer. Stainton Moses² describes her as 'plump and fairly good looking with a large mop of hair falling down to her waist. She is rather heavy-looking and has the peculiar look in the eyes which characterizes most, if not all mediums'.

Henry M. Dunphy, a barrister-at-law, seems to have acted as *compere* at many of Miss Showers's sittings, standing rather in the same relation as first Harrison, then Luxmoore, and then Crookes did to the Florence Cook seances.

The first indication we have of Crookes's interest in Rosina Showers is given by a paragraph in a letter of unknown date from him to Harrison, published in *The Spiritualist* for April 10, 1874, p. 176. This reads:

You can mention that Miss Cook's 'Katie' has been walking about in my laboratory along with Miss Showers' 'Florence' with their arms entwined schoolgirl fashion, and in a strong light. 'Katie' has also materialized and spoken when I have been in the cabinet with Miss Cook, holding her hand; but, being dark, I could see nothing except lights here and there, one of which settled on my coat-sleeve.³

It seems likely that this was Crookes's first opportunity to work

¹ This medium is almost always mentioned in the Spiritualist journals simply as 'Miss Showers'. Trevor Hall refers to her throughout his book as 'Mary', as does her mother on one occasion (see p. 112). On the other hand, Thomas Blyton, in a pamphlet, describes her as 'Miss Rosina Showers', and Moses's reference to her as 'Rosey', in his account of his first sitting with her (*Light*, Spring 1963), suggests that this was her designation in the family circle. In the present report we have followed Blyton and Moses.

² In *Stainton Moses and Contemporary Physical Mediums*, *Light*, Spring 1963, Moses's accounts of his sittings with Miss Showers, taken from his contemporary note books, are given in full.

³ See also comments by Cox and Mrs Showers, p. 109.

with Miss Showers. Over the next few weeks he had some further sittings, presumably with Miss Showers as the solo medium, and seems to have become unhappy with the results. The following letter appeared in *The Spiritualist* for June 19, 1874.

'On several recent occasions Mr Serjeant Cox has publicly alluded to opinions which I had privately written to him, respecting the electrical and other tests I was kindly permitted by Mrs and Miss Showers to try with the latter lady. For many reasons, I regret that Serjeant Cox has thought fit to introduce my name into this controversy; but having done so, I think it only justice to Miss Showers, as well as due to myself, that your readers should be in possession of the exact words I used. I therefore ask you to be good enough to print the following extracts from my letters to Serjeant Cox:

April 14th, 1874. I have had two experimental *seances* with Miss Showers, and have obtained certain results, but not enough to enable me to form a definite opinion. I must have more evidence. I have only had four¹ *seances* altogether with her, and that is quite an insufficient number. I had between thirty and forty *seances* with Miss Cook, before I felt justified in coming to a positive opinion. I notice that with every new medium one or two *seances* only leave suspicion on the mind. It was so in the case of Home, Williams, Herne, Miss Fox, Miss Cook and Miss Showers. In all instances where a great number of *seances* have been available, this suspicion has been replaced by belief; so it is not fair to attach too much importance to the unfavourable impression given by the first few *seances* with Miss Showers.

April 20th. I cannot make up my mind about Miss Showers. 'Katie' refuses to say anything about her or 'Florence'. But be Miss Showers genuine or not, I am satisfied that Miss Cook is true and honest. I have had too many *seances* with her, and have tried too many tests *like those you suggest*, to leave any doubt on my mind.

April 25th. The tests which Miss Cook stood well, Miss Showers failed to stand. But knowing how misled I was in Miss Cook's case at first, with even stronger grounds for suspicion than I have with Miss Showers, I wish to reserve judgment till I have more opportunities of experimenting. The evidence in her favour is *very strong*. I know five or six people who declare they have seen Miss Showers and the spirit Florence at the same time — Mr Dunphy, Mrs Corner, Mr Tapp, Mr Luxmoore and Miss Cook —

¹ There is an apparent discrepancy here. In a letter in *The Spiritualist* for May 29, 1874 (p. 262) Mrs Showers says: 'Mr Crookes was most interested in the tests with Miss Showers, and expressed himself most anxious to continue them but we could not give him more than two sittings. He has since requested more than once, that we will allow him an opportunity for investigation on our return to London.' The explanation, no doubt, is that these two sittings were the two 'experimental seances' mentioned by Crookes. His 'four seances' presumably include two at which he was merely a visitor.

and these on separate occasions. I have been in the cabinet all the time, near but not touching Miss Showers, while the 'spirit' was 'materialising', and then saw it open the curtain and take my hand. I could not see Miss Showers, as it was dark, but the risk of detection was too great for an impostor to venture on.

This is *all* which I have said or written to Serjeant Cox on the subject; the letters from which the above quotations are taken were written *currente calamo*; and would perhaps have been worded differently if I had foreseen their possible publication; but the opinions expressed in them I still hold.

To Lord Rayleigh he expressed himself more freely. The following letter is quoted in Rayleigh's biography¹ by his son:

4 Carlton Gardens, May 3rd, 1874

My dearest Mother:

You will be interested to know the result of my spiritualistic enquiries. I had an hour and a half's conversation with Crookes and saw no reason to doubt his trustworthiness. He said that Miss Showers's ghost Florence was as to bodily form Miss Showers herself, as he had proved in various ways, for instance by making Florence dip her hands into a bowl of dye, with the result that Miss Showers' hands were afterward dyed. She made no difficulties about submitting to tests, but they all failed. Crookes thinks that she may be got hold of by spirits who perhaps supply the dress, she all the while being unconscious. The same tests which fail with Miss Showers prove that Kate is not Miss Cook. Miss Cook is going to be married shortly, and Crookes is making the most of the interval.

The other night we had here to dinner Mr and Mrs Jencken (who was Kate Fox) with the Salisburys. We did not get anything quite conclusive but some raps, which could hardly have been made by the medium. The answers to questions were all wrong. Arthur [Bal-four] and I are going to see them at their own house. My mind is still in suspense, but I rather expect to be convinced.

Ever, Your affec. son,

RAYLEIGH.

Meanwhile, on April 3, 1874, an 'exposure' of Miss Showers at Serjeant Cox's residence had taken place. No reference to this appeared in print until May 8 in *The Medium and Daybreak* and May 15 in *The Spiritualist*, and it is not clear whether Crookes's letters to Cox related to Cox's experience or whether he was merely replying to general enquiries. Cox's account of the exposure is quoted in Trevor Hall's book (pp. 76-8). Mrs Showers's version, as might be expected, differs in important respects. The

¹ *Life of John William Strutt, Third Baron Rayleigh O.M.* by Robert John Strutt, Fourth Baron Rayleigh, F.R.S. (E. Arnold, London, 1924, p. 65).

incident took place on April 3, 1874, at Cox's country house in Hendon, whither Mrs and Miss Showers had gone, at Cox's pressing invitation, to spend a few days. It is common ground that, during a cabinet seance for 'spirit faces', Serjeant Cox's daughter drew aside, or attempted to draw aside, the curtains. Thereafter, accounts diverge. Cox says that Miss Showers, wearing a 'ghost head-dress', was found to be impersonating the spirit, and that she excused herself by saying that she had been in trance. Mrs Showers¹ flatly denies this on all counts: if her story were true, one would be forced to say that the Serjeant's testimony was not all that could be expected from a man of law! It is unfortunate that there were no independent witnesses at the sitting, the other sitters, besides Mrs Showers, being members of Cox's family.

Trevor Hall suggests that this exposure spread consternation among the 'friends of Florence Cook'. The trend of the contemporary discussion, and subsequent events, make this unlikely. Harrison did, indeed, refuse to publish Cox's letter, but the reasons that he gives for his refusal are such as would have carried considerable weight with his public. There seems little doubt that Cox, to some extent, bungled his exposure. It would, after all, be no very startling revelation to most Spiritualists of this period that under 'bad' conditions, a medium, allegedly in trance, might impersonate a 'spirit face'. 'Somnambulism' was a word freely used, by Cox as well as by others. Both sides were in agreement that an impersonation had taken place, the only point of contention being whether the deception was conscious. In the subsequent controversy, as Algernon Joy was quick to point out (*The Spiritualist* May 29, 1874, p. 262) Cox became entangled in a peculiar logical difficulty, perhaps due to a misplaced chivalry. As he himself said, he 'always stated his own conviction to be that it was not a deliberate imposture, but somnambulism'. On the other hand, every now and then he let slip phrases which carried an implicit assumption of conscious fraud. There seems little doubt that the exposure was premeditated by Cox, in spite of his claim to the contrary, and that if this were so, in inviting Mrs and Miss Showers to his house, somewhat under false pretences, he committed a breach of hospitality which is stressed (almost belaboured) by Mrs Showers in the pages of the two magazines. Mrs Showers also made great play with alleged 'injury' to the medium, which had been denied by Cox; the following passage relates to this, and incidentally casts an interesting side-light on these curious events. She says² that, after the exposure,

¹ *The Medium and Daybreak*, May 15, 1874, pp. 310-11.

² *The Medium and Daybreak*, May 15, 1874, pp. 310-11.

I could not recognize in the frantic creature who had to be held down to the floor, looking more like a wild animal than a human being, the smiling happy girl who had gone into the cabinet a few minutes before. *No injury to the medium!* Let the servants at Moat Mount give the lie to their master; for those shrieks might have been heard a mile off. *No injury to the medium!* What then kept Serjeant Cox an hour on his knees till his vain efforts to soothe and mesmerise aroused the jealousy of his wife, who, astounded at these novel manifestations of Spiritualism, turned her indignation on her husband as the *principal impostor*, exclaiming, 'He has no mesmeric power, none whatever. Make him get up! Make him get up!'

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that Cox's revelation caused no lasting dismay among Florence Cook's friends, and others, can be found in the unbroken series of tests and experiments that continued to be carried out with Miss Showers.¹ Of the published accounts, Charles Blackburn's is perhaps the most striking, and we shall return to this in a little while. Meantime, two points need to be brought out. One concerns this very important matter of the joint Showers-Cook seance, already referred to. Serjeant Cox rightly stresses the significance of this. In his letter published in *The Medium and Daybreak* for May 8, 1874 he says:

I have seen the forms of 'Katie' and 'Florence' together in the full light, coming out from the room in which Miss Cook and Miss Showers were placed, walking about, talking, playing girlish tricks, patting us and pushing. They were solid flesh and blood and bone. They breathed, and perspired, and ate,² and wore a white head-dress and a white robe from neck to foot, made of cotton and woven by a loom. Not merely did they resemble their respective mediums, they were fac-similes of them — alike in face, hair, complexion, teeth, eyes, hands, and movements of the body. Unless he had been otherwise so informed, no person would have doubted for a moment that the two girls who had been placed behind the curtains were now standing *in propria persona* before the curtain playing very prettily the character of ghost.³

¹ Besides the published accounts, to some of which we shall refer later, we can cite in this connection Myers's and Sidgwick's sittings with Miss Showers. Myers, according to his diary, did not meet Rosina until December 11, 1874, eight months after Cox's exposure. He records a sitting with her on March 18, 1875 and it seems clear that this was one of a number. Sidgwick, in an undated letter to Myers, writes: 'Could you admit me to Miss Showers on Friday & Saturday (19th & 20th)?' This must have been in 1875.

² Mrs Showers remarks (*The Spiritualist*, May 15, 1874, p. 231) 'Indeed! who provided the refreshments? Perhaps the kind-hearted serjeant had a few buns and nuts in his pocket, with which he contrived to feed them surreptitiously, after the fashion of wild animals in a menagerie.'

³ Nothing, however, in these tangled events can be taken at its face value. Against such very definite testimony has to be set Mrs Showers's comment

Cox makes his point more specific a couple of months later. In *The Medium and Daybreak* for July 10, 1874, p. 435, he says:

'Katie' and 'Florence' have appeared together more than once. I saw the two young ladies placed together behind the curtain, and 'Katie' and 'Florence', precisely resembling them, came before the curtain and played pretty tricks for an hour. Miss Cook and 'Katie' must therefore well know if 'Florence' was genuine or not. But both refuse to answer inquiries as to this, although told it was to save the credit of their associates. (Cf. Crookes's letter of April 20, p. 106.)

This is indeed a matter of crucial importance, but discussion of it will best be deferred until some additional evidence has been reviewed.

The second point to which we need to return briefly, concerns Crookes's remark, in his letter already quoted on p. 106, that five people, Dunphy, Mrs Amelia Corner (Florence Cook's future mother-in-law), Tapp, Luxmoore and Florence Cook, had seen Rosina Showers and her spirit 'Florence Maple' at the same time. Dunphy describes his experience in *The Spiritualist*, for May 15, 1874, p. 233. Florence Cook's testimony is given by a Dr W. L. Richardson in *The Medium and Daybreak*, April 3, 1874 p. 213 (this sitting took place on March 19). Tapp's and Luxmoore's report is given by the former in *The Spiritualist* for April 10, 1874, p. 174, and Mrs Amelia Corner (who claimed that both she and her daughter Caroline had seen the medium and the spirit together inside the cabinet) gives her account in *The Spiritualist* for May 22, 1874, p. 247. We may, perhaps, economize in space by not quoting these accounts, for reasons that will shortly appear: suffice it to say that even though, for such crucial tests, one might have hoped for still more rigorous precautions than are reported, the accounts, taken at their face value, form quite an impressive body of evidence.

One test for the genuineness or otherwise of Miss Showers's mediumship would be to ascertain whether the medium and her spirit-form were ever visible together. This was the test most strenuously advocated by Cox. Another possible approach was to tighten conditions to an acceptable level, and here interesting and puzzling results were obtained by Charles Blackburn. His report suffers from the prevailing defects of the time: no witnesses's names are given, we are not told how long after the sitting the report

(*ibid.*), 'One thing here, I observe, he [i.e. Cox] has again omitted, and that is that after that *seance* he dressed Miss Showers' head in some drapery, placed and measured her against the door-post and then, finding her some inches shorter, he turned away exclaiming, 'It is not the same face; no, that is *not* the same face.' Mr Crookes and a member of his family present can corroborate this.'

was written, and we are not assured specifically that no alternative exits or means of concealment were to be found in the small dressing-room in which the medium was seated. We have to rely on Blackburn's common-sense, and this, of course, is not a satisfactory state of affairs. Blackburn describes¹ his tests, which seem quite well designed, in these words:

When last in London I had not the opportunity of seeing anything of Miss Showers's mediumship, as she and Mrs Showers had returned home to Teignmouth; therefore, I wrote and asked permission to go there and have some seances privately. This was promptly replied to by inviting me; so I went to an hotel there and remained a week but called every evening at Mrs Showers's, whose kindness and hospitality were everything I could desire.

Now, I had previously thought over how I must set about proving the truth, or otherwise, of this young lady's mediumship, and I concluded that it merely required the substantiating of three points, viz: 1st. The spirit voice, that it was not hers by ventriloquism. 2nd. When a face appeared, that it was not her with a mask. 3rd. When a full form appeared, that it was not her own bodily form at all. I consider these to be the points to be solved in all these phenomena in their present condition of progress.

1. *The Spirit Voice.* After hearing three or four different voices singing in the dark, whilst Miss Showers played the piano, I lit the candles and asked her away from the piano to a chair, with its back against the wall, so that I could see her face all the time; I then made her take a mouthful of water, and asked the spirit 'Peter' to speak; he instantly shouted in his robust voice, 'Will that do for you?' Miss Showers then spat the water from her mouth into a basin, and this experiment was repeated. The loud voice seemed to come from about twelve or fourteen inches above her head, and fully satisfied me it was not done by her.
2. *Faces Appearing.* A curtain was fixed in front of a small dressing-room doorway, reaching to about six inches from the top, and Miss Showers sat just within the curtain. I tied a tape close round her waist and sealed it, and brought the ends outside, fastening them with nails, visible to all eyes, exactly level with her waist as she sat on a very low seat. It was not possible she could reach the top of the curtain within a yard, and, had she got up, the tape and nails must have been rent asunder. She became entranced, and various faces appeared; the spirit shortly afterwards told us to go inside and see. We did so, and found her in a trance, tied exactly as I had fastened her; therefore, it was not her doing.
3. *Full Form appearing and coming out of Cabinet amongst us.* The same little dressing-room and curtained door was used, but the curtain was nailed to the top of the moulding of the door to shut out all light, and a couch was placed inside. Now, in this import-

¹ *The Spiritualist*, August 21, 1874, p. 87.

ant test I took her left ear-ring out, and passed a threaded needle through the aperture, with five yards of thread. Miss Showers lay down on the couch and I threaded the two ends of the strings through where the door hinges, and fastened them to a nail driven by a gentleman into the door casing, and visible to all; thus she had a single thread through her ear in her dark room, and we had the two ends in the light room. She was quickly entranced, and very shortly a spirit named 'Lenore' came forth amongst us perfectly destitute of any thread fastening. We all felt her ears; she had no boring whatever through her ears, and the lobes were very thin and far smaller than Miss Showers's. She had only one large toe to each foot; the other four toes were ossifications, and not toes at all. We all examined her very small feet with our hands and eyes; nor are we in the slightest mistaken. She told us her feet would have been perfected had there been more power. When this figure retired, we all went into the cabinet with faint light, and awoke Miss Showers. She had the thread through her ear just as when she first lay down on the couch. We cut the threads close to her ear, and traced it direct to the nail without a knot or piercing in it. Miss Showers's feet, I scarcely need say, are perfect, and were examined.*

I now leave the public to judge whether it is fair to slander such an excellent, truthful, and honourable medium. In fact, a debt of gratitude is due to both Miss Cook (that was) and Miss Showers; indeed, any gentleman who has a proper mind would apologise to both families for recent language used against these two respectable young ladies, only eighteen years of age.

Parkfield, Didsbury, near Manchester, August 13, 1874.

* Mrs Showers, in the course of a note to us, says — 'Last night Mr Blackburn passed a thread, some yards long, through my daughter's left ear, and brought out the ends into the room where we were sitting. Lenore appeared, walked about among us and allowed us all to feel her ears. There was no thread in them, and at the conclusion of the seance Mary was found on the sofa, precisely as she had been left. From the moment that the spirit first appeared we observed that she held out her left foot in a very remarkable manner. It looked more like a hoof than a foot. All of us were allowed to hold it, and to examine it in succession. There was only one toe, and the others were wanting! I really felt a very peculiar sensation at the time. [Note by the Editor of *The Spiritualist*.]

The phenomenon of the ossified toes is again, a couple of years later, described by James Burns in his account of a sitting in September 1876.¹ He tells us:

I was permitted to examine somewhat the left foot of the figure; it seemed to be larger than the foot of the medium, but it had only one

¹ *The Medium and Daybreak*, September 29, 1876, p. 613.

toe — the great toe — which was well-developed, with a good broad nail, the inner corner of which projected sharply. At the root of this great toe I felt the rudiments of another toe, after which the foot tapered off, terminating at the line from which the toes ought to have sprung. I had not the opportunity to give the foot that strict scrutiny which I could have desired as the spirit said my manipulations were painful.

Burns also lays considerable stress on the differences in height between Miss Showers and her two spirits, 'Florence Maple' and 'Lenore'. He claims to have ascertained by measurement against the wall that 'Florence' was four inches taller than Rosina. This variation of height was reported by Stainton Moses¹ and other observers: they insist that it was not produced by tip-toeing.

We can now return to Crookes's association with Rosina Showers. Towards the end of 1875, something like a bombshell exploded. The story is best told in Crookes's words. The following is a series of letters from Crookes to D. D. Home, preserved in the Society's D. D. Home Collection:

Private

Nov. 3rd, 1875.
20 Mornington Road,
London, N.W.

My dear Dan,

Absence from home has prevented me from replying to your letter of the 30th ult. by return of post.

I do not know what reports you may have heard about me, and I wish you would as a friend tell me more of them, and if possible send me over one of the letters you say refers to me. I think I know the originator of the reports. Were the letters not written to Mr Gledstanes?

As for Miss Showers, the facts are simple enough. She confessed to Mrs Fay that her manifestations were all a trick, and very properly Mrs Fay told me. I thereupon employed Mrs Fay, as I should employ a detective to unearth a fraud, and by her assistance got a complete confession in Miss S's handwriting. I have since had several interviews with Miss S. and have induced her to give up these tricks, I promising not to bring about a public exposure but only to warn my private friends. Do not therefore say anything about this.

Mrs Showers found out I was meeting her daughter and fired up at it, putting the worst construction on it. I was bound by promise not to expose Miss S. to her mother, so I refused to explain. Probably I was wrong in this, but I could not break a promise.

But Miss S. had accomplices according to her account, and one of the gentlemen implicated has before now written very shameful things about me to Paris, so between the Mother and others I am getting the reputation of a Don Juan. Fortunately those whose opinion I

¹ *Light*, Spring 1963, p. 28.

care about, know me too well to believe these slanders, but it is very annoying, for I cannot appeal to the law for a remedy in this case, knowing the very great injury which the cause of the truth would suffer if so impudent a fraud were to be publicly exposed in the newspapers. My good and true wife knows *everything* about this and quite approves of my conduct, so I can well afford to let the matter blow over.

I have worked hard and sacrificed more than anyone would believe for the cause of spiritualism, and I have met with little but calumny, slander, backbiting and abuse from spiritualists. To anyone else I would not take the trouble to make these explanations, but I look upon you as one of the real friends I have, and I would not spare any trouble to retain your friendship and good opinion. If you want any further explanation ask and I will send it you, but please consider what I tell you as given in confidence.

My wife sends her love to Julie and yourself, and with the same from me, Believe me,

Your affectionate friend,
WILLIAM CROOKES.

Private

November 6th, 1875.
20 Mornington Road,
London, N.W.

My dear Dan,

As Miss Showers begged so earnestly that I would not expose her to her mother and it was necessary for me to see her several times, I had to write occasional notes to her making appointments. I put nothing in them that all the world might not know. But I have a letter from Mrs Showers in which she coolly tells me that she intercepted *every* letter, opened them by ungumming the envelopes over hot water and replaced my note by one written by herself imitating my writing. More than this she tells me she has written to her daughter — purporting to come from me — when I had not written at all. Miss Showers at last showed me one of these forgeries; neither the language nor writing was mine. Of course I cannot say how far the woman may have gone in these forgeries, with the object of damaging my character, but she dare not do more than threaten, for my writing is too well known (sic) to deceive anyone I care about. We saw Carrie a few days ago. She sends her love to you and your wife. Accept same from Nellie and myself,

Yours very sincerely,
WILLIAM CROOKES.

Nov. 11th, 1875.
20 Mornington Road,
London, N.W.

Dear Dan,

The two letters enclosed have come for you. The foreign one was open at the end just as I send it. I hear that Mrs Showers has been to

Miss Douglass and elsewhere, scandalising me to such an extent that I am afraid I must put the affair into the hands of my lawyer.

Hoping that both you and Julie are better than you were. With kind love in which Nellie joins, Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,
WILLIAM CROOKES.

Mme Home, in her book *D. D. Home, His Life and Mission*, 1888, p. 396, quotes a passage from a letter from Crookes to Home dated November 24, 1875. While this has up till now been somewhat obscure, it seems clear that it refers to the Miss Showers imbroglio. It reads:

I am so disgusted with the whole thing that, *were it not for the regard we bear to you*, I would cut the whole Spiritual connection, and never read, speak, or think of the subject again.

The next relevant letter in the D. D. Home Collection reads as follows:

Dec. 8th, 1875.
20 Mornington Road,
N.W.

My dear Dan,

I enclose three letters which have arrived for you. It is very nice to read such a kind sympathetic letter as you have sent me. Fortunately however your friendship will not have to bear a very severe strain. The scandal which like everything of the sort has been enormously magnified in transmission, had for its origin some forged letters. However I have had a full explanation with the person who first started the rumours and have a full withdrawal in writing of every insinuation or statement made against my character and motives and a promise that everything possible shall be done to neutralize any injurious effect which these reports may have caused. I am so busy with scientific matters that I have really no time to spare for fruitless controversy and have therefore agreed to let the matter drop.

I suppose you know that the Royal Society have given me the Royal Medal this year for my scientific researches. I am on the point of starting for Leeds where I shall be detained on business for a week. My wife joins me in kindest regards to Julie and yourself, hoping you are both in better health than the last account.

Believe me,
Very sincerely yours,
WILLIAM CROOKES.

The 'person who first started the rumours' is evidently Mrs Showers.

The effects of these upsets and revelations on Crookes's attitude to psychical matters is shown by the following extract from a letter from Mrs Crookes to D. D. Home written a month later.

20 Mornington Road,
N.W.

Jan. 11th, [1876].

My dear Dan,

Willie is away at Leeds. I shall send your letter on today. He is terribly busy but I am sure he will write to you if possible. We have seen nobody connected with spiritualism for some time past, for we have had so much annoyance and insult from so many persons that I prefer cutting the whole set. Very few spiritualists seem to me to have 'truth' for their motto, and all such disclosures as we hear of constantly now, upset any amount of testimony in favour of the phenomena. In my humble opinion, if a *medium is made to cheat by bad spirits* (the usual excuse) he or she ought to be avoided as much as though they were found cheating of their own will; it is nonsense to expect the public to believe such an explanation. My husband and myself will never uphold such doings. Have you seen the paragraph in this week's *Spiritualist*, a quotation from *The Guardian* in which poor Florrie Corner is made responsible for Dale Owen's recent illness and insanity.

Spiritualists here are much to blame for that scandal, when the Holmes were in England they were denounced several times, but with the usual result. Finding how loth spiritualists are to believe that they have been deceived, they got more and more daring, and even now there are people who support them and attend their seances. I hope Willie will keep to his resolution to keep away from public mediums and never print anything on the subject again. How we should enjoy a few seances with you; if it were not for the recollection of our early sittings with you and one or two other mediums, I should be almost inclined to think that it was all a fraud from beginning to end.

.....

Affectionately yours,
ELLEN CROOKES.

A great deal can be deduced from these letters. Important points are:

1. Crookes, having Miss Showers's written confession, warned his 'private friends'.
2. Crookes employed Mrs Fay, as a 'detective', in other words she used some sort of pretext to obtain the confession. Now, Mrs Fay was *not* a materialization medium, so it is fair to presume that her pretext would be a request for instruction how best to produce materializations.
3. Miss Showers had accomplices.
4. One of the 'gentlemen implicated' had written 'shameful things' about Crookes to Paris, and judging from Crookes's request to Home at the beginning of the letter of Nov. 3, Home somehow had possession of some of these letters.

We now consider Cox's letter to D. D. Home, written on March 8, 1876 and published in Home's book *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism* (Virtue, London, 1877, pp. 326-29). The relevant passage runs:

.... But I have learned how the trick is done. I have seen the description of it given by a medium to another medium who desired instruction. The letter was in her own handwriting, and the whole style of it showed it to be genuine.

She informs her friend that she comes to the *seance* prepared with a dress that is easily taken off with a little practice. She says it may be done in two or three minutes. She wears two shifts (probably for warmth). She brings a muslin veil of thin material (she gives its name, which I forget). *It is carried in her drawers!* It can be compressed into a small space, although when spread it covers the whole person. A pocket-handkerchief pinned round the head keeps back the hair. She states that she takes off all her clothes except the two shifts, and is covered by the veil. The gown is spread carefully upon the sofa over the pillows. In this array she comes out. She makes very merry with the spiritualists whom she thus gulls, and her language about them is anything but complimentary.

This explains the whole business. The question so often asked before was — where the robe could be carried? It could not be contained in the bosom or in a sleeve. Nobody seems to have thought of the drawers.

But it will be asked how we can explain the fact that some persons have been permitted to go behind the curtain when the form was before it, and have asserted that they saw or felt the medium. I am sorry to say the confession to which I have referred states without reserve that these persons knew that it was a trick, and lent themselves to it. I am, of course, reluctant to adopt such a formidable conclusion, although the so-called 'confession' was a confidential communication from one medium to another medium who had asked to be instructed how the trick was done. I prefer to adopt the more charitable conclusion that they were imposed upon

The concordance of dates and the agreement, point by point, between Cox's and Crookes's description makes it seem highly likely that Cox is referring to Miss Showers's written statement to Mrs Fay¹ regarding which Crookes, as he says, warned his 'private

¹ Trevor Hall makes an attempt to demonstrate that the letter referred to by Cox was from Florence Cook to Miss Showers and, in fact, by the time one comes to the index of Hall's book, this conjecture has hardened into an established fact! Rather more serious is the fact that in a B.B.C. dramatization of Hall's story (Home Service, February 19, 1963, under the title *The Ghost of Katie King*, in the series *The Impostors — A Series of Fakes, Frauds and Forgeries*), there was read out what purported to be a letter on the lines indicated by Cox but stated to be from Miss Cook to Miss Showers. No warning was given that such a letter is not (and, as seems likely, never has been) in existence.

friends'. If we accept that this is so, Cox's account forms a valuable supplement to that of Crookes. In particular it states that the 'accomplices', referred to by Crookes, were those people who had claimed to see medium and spirit together, and we know (cf. Crookes's statement quoted on p. 106) that these included Messrs Dunphy, Tapp, Luxmoore, Mrs Corner and Miss Florence Cook.

All the three gentlemen involved were men of established position, and it is perhaps not easy to accept that they would publicly give false testimony in order to support a young girl engaged in a series of frauds. Their evidence, however, is very positive as regards the authenticity of Rosina's phenomena, and if we were disposed to accept it we should have to suppose the medium's confession to be false. Crookes, at any rate, seems to have accepted the confession at its face value, and he had the benefit of a series of interviews with the lady.

Can any further evidence be found to substantiate the inference that Messrs Dunphy, Tapp or Luxmoore acted as confederates in Rosina Showers's alleged frauds? There may be some, and though it cannot be regarded as conclusive, we give it for what it is worth. Crookes told Home that one of the 'accomplices', a gentleman, had written 'shameful things' about him to Paris, and implied that Home had some of these letters. It is thus natural to look among Home's records for letters by either Dunphy, Tapp or Luxmoore. There is, in fact, one fragment of a letter by Luxmoore in

This seems to us very unfortunate, since to present imaginative reconstructions as fact is merely adding confusion to an already obscure situation.

Even without the evidence of Crookes's letters to D. D. Home, it has always seemed unlikely that the letter referred to by Cox could be instruction from Florence Cook to Rosina Showers. It is clear from the literature that the two girls did not meet until early in 1874, and their first joint sitting appears to have been the one in Crookes's laboratory. Miss Showers's phenomena began to appear early in the previous year (see, for example, Stainton Moses's account of his first sitting with this medium referred to on p. 105), and, when she met Florence, were in full swing. She would hardly have needed instruction.

Hall's only point of substance is that Cox refers to the medium as having her head 'wrapped in a shawl'; this was a feature of Florence's sittings, but not of Miss Showers's. But poor Cox did sometimes have trouble with points of detail. That the phrase 'wrapped in a shawl' applied to Miss Showers seems to have stuck rather firmly in his mind and he tried unsuccessfully to father it first on Dunphy and then on Mr Benjamin Coleman (see *The Spiritualist* for June 5 and June 26, 1874). One other supporting point adduced by Hall is that Home later told Flammarion that it was 'within his knowledge that Florence Cook's mediumship was based on skilled trickery'. Flammarion's actual words (*Mysterious Psychic Forces*, Boston, 1907, p. 343) are: 'The medium Home, employed, as we have seen, in the first experiments of Professor Crookes, gave it to me as his personal opinion that Miss Cook was only a skilful trickster, and had shamefully deceived the eminent scientist; and as for mediums, why there was only one absolutely trustworthy and that was himself, Daniel Dunglas Home!' It is apparent that Hall's phrase 'within his knowledge' carries an implication that is not to be found in Flammarion's remark.

the Society's D. D. Home collection which may well fit the specification. The first page is missing, so that the date is unknown. The context suggests that it is of the right period. The relevant portion reads:

16 Gloucester Square,
Hyde Park.

'highly . . . ? . . . medium, do almost what he likes and among other things got the spirits to say that *he must* be asked to every seance and published very rude and egotistical remarks. I kept quiet until he had so far committed himself as to the truth of the phenomena which took place in the presence of Miss Cook (now Mrs E. Corner) and then absolutely withdrew from the seances. His [life] since that time has not been altogether a bed of roses as Mr E. Corner has given him a very good thrashing and in my opinion he richly deserved it. Mr Crookes was silly enough [to] take out a summons against Mr Corner for an assault but not foolish enough to appear when the summons was called on. Mr Corner was present and courted every enquiry, but the complainant not being there, the magistrate could neither go into the case nor allow any statement to be made. He however ordered Mr Crookes, whose lawyer was present, to pay all costs. This is not the only mess he has got into, but I do not feel at liberty to write more. In my opinion Mr Crookes is quite ignorant of what is due from one gentleman to another and because he is an F.R.S. arrogates to himself much that is most unbecoming. He once told me that if he testifies to a fact, people would believe it, but my doing so would, he implied, amount to nothing. He got his answer you may depend upon it, and if ever an opportunity offers, will have some rather unpleasant things told him.

I suppose there is not much chance of your being in London at present. I have given you a terribly long yarn (?), so now think it is time to stop, and remain,

Yours sincerely,
J. C. LUXMOORE.

This certainly matches up very neatly with Crookes's remark to Home that 'one of the gentlemen implicated has before now written very shameful things about me to Paris'.

We have not been able to discover what truth, if any, there is in Luxmoore's assertions regarding Crookes's action against Corner. It appears that court records so far back do not now exist. Luxmoore's letter is written in a wild and difficult handwriting, and gives the impression of having been put down under some stress, though since we have no other specimen of his writing for comparison this might be an unjustified inference.

It is not clear what occasioned the assault, if it did indeed take place. Its date is presumably to be taken as the autumn of 1875.

Certainly, after Florence's marriage, Crookes was on Christian-name terms with Corner (see his letter to Gimingham dated August 29, 1874, quoted on p. 68). One of Florence's letters to Blackburn, probably written in the early summer of 1875 (see p. 71), refers to Corner's consent for Florence to give sittings to Blackburn and Crookes only: the presumed quarrel between Crookes and Corner, therefore, if it took place, must have occurred later. Luxmoore, rather strikingly, makes no reference to any scandalous association between Crookes and Florence.

The promise that Crookes extracted from Rosina to 'give up these tricks' seems to have done no more than deter her, or her mother, from publicity for something under a year. In *The Medium and Daybreak* for September 29, 1876, p. 613, we find a long account by James Burns of a four-part sitting lasting right through the evening, held at Mrs Showers's London residence in Seymour Place, Bryanston Square. A full range of phenomena was offered, from direct-voice to materialization. If it is accepted, on the basis of the confession obtained by Crookes, that all Miss Showers's phenomena were fraudulent, examination of Burns's account might well make one reluctant to take any of the evidence offered during this period of psychical research at its face value. The conditions as described would seem on this occasion to have been irreproachable. The introduction of an accomplice would appear impossible. But 'Florence Maple' duly materialized, much taller than the medium, barefooted and, as we have already mentioned, with ossified toes (p. 112). The hypothesis of fraud *must* require that Burns's account is inaccurate.

Down through the years, Miss Showers (later Mrs Nugent James), continued to produce her phenomena. Her mother, ever enthusiastic, tells in *Light* for January 28, 1882, an alarming story. She says:

The Spirit manifestations, which commenced when Miss Showers was only sixteen years old, nearly cost her her life, and she will probably never entirely recover from their effects. For more than six months she lost the use of her limbs, and lay in a partially cataleptic state of utter helplessness, but with the awful, unspeakable reality of Spiritualism ever present to her. She was seen by Sir William Gull, and constantly attended by two physicians, who pronounced her malady to be hysteria in an aggravated form. When youth and a good constitution ultimately triumphed, her friends still retained too vivid a recollection of her sufferings to allow the same risks to be incurred again. This, sir, is the sole reason why Miss Showers' manifestations have been discontinued, and I have no doubt many of your readers, and even your respected correspondent, will consider it an efficient one.

But both before and after this, Rosina was giving physical seances, with the approval of Mr Nugent James, her husband.¹ One can only wonder what Sir William Gull had to say about his patient's continued indulgence in these hazardous pursuits.

It may well be asked why Crookes, with the knowledge that he had, failed to prevent these continued activities. A partial answer may be suggested by a letter which he wrote to Home on January 21, 1876, immediately after the Showers upheaval. This is quoted in *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, 1877 (p. 183), and reads as follows.

Jan. 21st, 1876.

I am doubtful whether such a book [i.e., *Lights and Shadows* . . .] as you propose to publish will do any real good. You know mediums have the reputation of being very jealous of one another, and consequently, any accusations which may be brought by one against another, however well supported they may be by facts, are explained away in this manner. And even when two partners quarrel, and one makes a clean breast of it, or when one medium makes a confession of fraud, and explains how it is done, very few thorough-going spiritualists will believe them, but will rather call in the agency of bad spirits, trance, etc.

Another thing you must bear in mind — you, or I, or any other tolerably clear-headed observer may be perfectly sure that cheating is being perpetrated by some professed medium; we may even have had a full confession by the medium that the whole thing is a fraud; yet it may be so difficult as to amount practically to an impossibility to bring this fraud home to the impostor in so clear a manner as would compensate one for the vexation and trouble which would thereby be caused.

D. D. Home's *Lights and Shadows* duly emerged in spite of Crookes's warning of its probable effect. That it did, because of its very outspoken attack on fraudulent practices by some of the best known mediums, cause Crookes considerable embarrassment is shown by the following passage from a letter by Mrs Crookes to Home.

Feb. 4th, 1878.
20 Mornington Road,
London, N.W.

My dear Dan,

Willie is in Paris for a few days so I will answer your letter at once myself. He has been very very busy and a great deal away from home for some months past, and he has really felt very much the awkward

¹ For a series of seances attended in 1880 by Dr George Wyld, later an S.P.R. Council member, see *The Spiritualist*, Vol. XVII pp. 246, 258 and 262. A seance witnessed by Mrs Everett's sister, Constance, in April 1883, is described in the 'Everett Diaries', Vol. 6, p. 1229, a lengthy manuscript preserved in the S.P.R. archives. Constance was 'not prepossessed' by Mrs James.

position he has been placed in by your book. I can assure you it is the best weapon Dr Carpenter and his class have ever had, for of course it is looked upon simply as a complete exposure of the whole subject by the biggest impostor of the lot; and as you may see how difficult it is for your friends to say anything to counteract the evil effects of your own statements. Now I hope you will not be offended at what I have said, we have talked several times about writing to you, but Willie felt he would wait a little longer as he did not want to hurt your feelings as he might have done when he was irritated by the unfair attacks upon him, in which quotations from your book were so abundant, to prove how easily he had been deceived by the mediums.

.....
Give my kind love to Julie and accept the same yourself from,
Yours very sincerely,
ELLEN CROOKES.

It seems clear enough from the tone of this letter and of Crookes's earlier letter to Home that, having failed to suppress Miss Showers permanently by private negotiation, he would have been very disinclined to have gone to the length of public exposure.

Nevertheless there will be many who will feel that whatever his personal difficulties, Crookes failed in his duty to the subject and to the cause of scientific truth by saying nothing about Miss Showers's confession, even when she resumed her 'tricks'. Crookes had publicly by implication sponsored the two spirit forms of Florence Cook and Rosina Showers when they appeared together, in his message to Harrison for publication in *The Spiritualist* (see p. 105); and it may well be considered that he owed it to his trusting readers to tell them the facts, when his earlier pronouncement had been shown to be false at least in part, and he himself deceived.

We have now to consider how these events bear on Florence Cook's phenomena, and particularly on the current suggestion that Crookes and she were partners in fraud. The point which Cox reiterated was that if Miss Showers's 'Florence' were fraudulent, so must Miss Cook's 'Katie' be fraudulent also, or, at least, 'Katie' or Florence Cook or both must know the truth. In view of what we now know, we can give the problem a somewhat different turn. If Crookes were in collusion with Florence Cook, so that he knew that 'Katie' was fraudulent, then he *must*, after Florence's and Rosina's joint sitting, have known that 'Florence Maple' was fraudulent. A number of questions arise. Why, in that case, did he ever allow this dangerous joint sitting, which would let a third, potentially unreliable, person into his secret? Why did he reveal his doubts of Miss Showers to Cox and Lord Rayleigh in advance

of Cox's 'exposure'? But above all, why when Mrs Fay told him of Miss Showers's verbal confession to her, did he adopt the elaborate and, as it turned out, very troublesome plan of trapping the girl into a written confession and circularizing this to his 'private friends'? It would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to have told Mrs Fay that Miss Showers was a doubtful quantity but that he had no interest in stirring up a scandal and that the matter might be quietly dropped. (Mrs Fay was under an obligation to him, and would presumably have made no difficulty about carrying out his wishes: it is a measure of her trustworthiness that she seems never to have made public the Showers confession.) Certainly, on the hypothesis that Crookes was Florence Cook's confederate, he had no new information to gain by forcing this written confession out of Rosina Showers.

Summarizing, we suggest that if Crookes were convinced of Florence Cook's authenticity, with all the difficulties that this hypothesis carries with it, his behaviour when confronted with the Showers crisis becomes comprehensible. We can, on the other hand, find no plausible pattern in these events on the hypothesis of Crookes's complicity with Florence. Nevertheless, if we take at its face value Crookes's own story of these events, as given in his letter published in *The Spiritualist* for April 10, 1874 (see p. 105) and in his letters to Home, we are left in great perplexity to imagine how Crookes reconciled Miss Showers's admission that *all* her manifestations were fraudulent with the joint Cook-Showers session. Surely he would have asked Miss Showers about this during the clandestine meetings. Did he also discuss it with Florence Corner (she was in London at the time)? We should never forget that what we now have is only a fraction of the correspondence and documentation that must once have existed, and that papers now lost or inaccessible would doubtless give clarification to many points that puzzle us. It is certain that Crookes retained, or at any rate professed, faith in the authenticity of Florence's phenomena up to her death (see pp. 73 and 74), but so far as we know he never offered to explain away this very difficult situation of a genuine 'Katie' promenading with a confessedly spurious 'Florence'.

10. CROOKES'S LATER WORK WITH PHYSICAL MEDIUMS

Crookes never referred in public to any further experiments with physical mediumship after his report in March 1875 on his tests with Mrs Fay (see p. 95). It seems unlikely that he would have abandoned the subject completely, and, in fact, in the years

1888-90 we find him taking part in an S.P.R. committee concerned with physical mediumistic phenomena. The very impressive personnel of this committee also included Lodge, Myers, Barrett and Sidgwick. It is recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on May 19, 1890 that Crookes undertook to contact Mrs Edmonds of Grafton Street with a view to arranging sittings, but there is no record of the outcome.

We have been able to find only one certain and one very doubtful allusion to sittings attended by Crookes during the forty year period from the termination of his seances with Eva Fay and Florence Cook to the death of his wife.

The first occurs in a letter from Crookes to Lodge, dated October 20, 1894, in which he writes: 'Has Myers said anything to you about Duguid and the proposed meetings here for "Spirit photographs"?' One such meeting took place on December 7, 1894: in Myers's diary an entry for this date reads: 'Sitting Duguid with Crookes fails.'

The doubtful allusion is in a narrative by 'Cheiro' (Count Louis Hamon)¹ which purports to describe a late sitting with Florence Cook. Referring to Florence's mediumship, Hamon remarks: 'It was only a week previously that General Sir Alfred Turner and I had been present in Sir William Crookes's house when not one but several spirits had materialised and walked about the room in full light.' General Sir Alfred Turner assisted Gambier Bolton (see p. 83) in founding the Society for Spiritists in 1899, and this organization sponsored many sittings with Florence. If indeed Crookes had sittings with Florence in her late period this would be of the greatest interest. However, the tone of Hamon's book is not such as to inspire confidence in the author's reliability, and in fact some details are plainly incorrect.

During the last three years of his life, after the death of his wife in May 1916, Crookes had experiences which convinced him of Lady Crookes's survival. Fournier d'Albe suggests in his biography that the stress of Crookes's bereavement reduced him to a state of credulous acceptance of dubious mediumistic phenomena. Fournier d'Albe instances Crookes's belief that he had obtained a 'psychic photograph' of his wife through the medium Hope, of Crewe. Crookes's own account is contained in two letters by him to Sir Oliver Lodge (preserved in the Lodge collection). On December 22, 1916 he writes:

My dear Lodge,

At a seance I had with Mr Hope, at Crewe on the 10th inst. I ob-

¹ First published as a chapter in his book *True Ghost Stories*, The London Publishing Company, London, 1927.

tained a Spirit photograph of my dear departed. I enclose you a print of it. I recognise it as very like what she was ten years ago, by comparing it with photos. taken by me about that date. There could not possibly be any trickery as the plate never left my possession and I did all the manipulation and developing myself. I am glad to say the possession of this definite proof of survival has done my heart much good.

At the same sitting a commencement of a message to you was given on a plate, but it was not easy to make out, and we could not get the remainder. At a subsequent sitting, I being absent, Miss Scatcherd got the (supposed) conclusion. She brought me the two negatives, and I enclose you prints of them which I hope you will be able to make out.

Lodge, in his reply dated December 23, 1916, writes:

I am amazed to hear that you have been to Crewe and have got results. I confess I have been extremely sceptical about that man Hope. I am impressed with your evidence of course but cannot say I am convinced. . . . That you have been convinced is one of the most extraordinary facts that has come to my knowledge in connexion with the Crewe phenomena. . . .

In a second letter dated December 27, 1916, Crookes adds:

I consider the evidence I have of the genuineness of the Crewe photograph is unimpeachable. I went into the question of photographic trickery many years ago,¹ and from confessions and admissions I had from tricksters I am acquainted with all the dodges possible. In my case, at Crewe the plate never left my possession except for the minute when Mr. Hope put it in and took it out of the camera. He could not possibly have done anything to deceive me. The picture I developed on the plate is not a fac-simile of any photograph ever taken of my Wife.

We reproduce the first of the photographs mentioned by Crookes (plate 5), whose identifying marks can be clearly seen. Fournier d'Albe remarks, in regard to this photograph, that 'The negative, according to Mr Gardiner [an assistant of Crookes], showed clear signs of double exposure.' It is most unfortunate that none of the negatives appear now to exist.

Miss F. R. Scatcherd gives a remarkable account of one of, apparently, a series of materialization seances in Crookes's house, in her contribution to a volume entitled *Survival* (G. P. Putnam, London and New York, 1924). The reference to his leg injury

¹ Cf. pp. 40 and 124, relating to the years 1873 and 1894 respectively. It should be noticed that in the 1850's Crookes was editor of the *Liverpool Photographic Journal* and later of the *Journal of the London Photographic Society*. In his *Researches* he refers to his very numerous papers on the theory and practice of photography.

and to the presence of a nurse fixes the date as April or May of 1917 (see Fournier d'Albe's *Life of Sir William Crookes*, p. 406). Miss Scatcherd was a member of the S.P.R. and editor of the *Asiatic Review*. Her account is as follows.

'It was in the late Sir William Crookes's little dark room, at 7, Kensington Park Gardens, that I finally verified certain surmises as to the use made of ectoplasm as a means of demonstrating survival.

No reference has been made to these latest experiments by Mr. Fournier d'Albe, in his 'Life of Sir William Crookes', except on one page and that reference is couched in vague and misleading terms.¹

There were present Mrs Z, the medium, Sir William and myself. Sir William having injured his leg by a fall, was in need of skilled attention. Otherwise his health was perfect. The nurse objected to his psychic activities, and together with others like-minded, made things difficult.

Once Sir William had arranged himself in his long chair, in the dark room, there was just space for two other persons to be seated, and no room for moving about without detection. One afternoon, after the lights were out and the phenomena had started, someone opened the door. A shaft of light fell full on the medium, who gave a gasp of agony, while I called out: 'Shut the door. You are spoiling our experiment.'

But the door was not properly re-closed. By means of the crack of light I saw a bulky mass pass between Sir William and myself, partially obscuring the light, in places shutting it out completely. For a moment I thought the medium had left her chair, and stretching out my left hand, struck the knee of the entranced sensitive rigid in her place. At the same time a voice said:

'You have hurt my medium. You have been told you should never touch her when we are working. She was already suffering on account of the light. No, do not close the seance. We will shield her from the light, and will do our best to carry on.'

Sir William was literally enveloped in the ectoplasmic mist, which was apparently weightless, as he felt nothing, though it seemed to be resting on his injured leg. But the substance was so arranged as to cut off the light where it struck the medium, while leaving enough for me to see, to some extent, what was occurring.

Meanwhile a lively conversation was in progress between Sir William and the spirit of his late wife, who seemed to be most dexterous in managing the ectoplasmic column and manipulating it according to the slightest expressed wish of the sitters.

I did not see the formation of the hand that caressed her husband's forehead and greeted myself with a touch, but I heard Lady Crookes say, in answer to Sir William's regret that he could not see her (he had his back to the door), 'I am here beside you, Willie dear. Listen while I carry the musical box round the room.'

¹ *Life of Sir William Crookes*, p. 405.

But I did perceive the upper end of the ectoplasmic column form itself into a rough gripping apparatus and heard it groping for the musical box at our feet.

By means of the bar of light I saw the musical box as it was whirled past the door and round and round Sir William's head.

The box had been purchased for the purpose, a day or two earlier, at Gamage's, and was wound up and stopped at our request, or at that of the unseen intelligence in a way impossible to ourselves, on account of the nature of its mechanism. It was passed gently up and down his injured leg and most of the time two or more voices were speaking with Sir William and myself. But I concentrated on observing as far as possible the behaviour of the ectoplasm, and did not make my usual record of the conversations.

I had known Lady Crookes during her lifetime, and was now witness of her attempts to make use of ectoplasm as a means of demonstrating her survival, by actions and effects that needed only the register of the normal five senses for their perception.

The medium was ill for some time as a result of the shock caused by the sudden letting in of the light. Also where I had placed my hand on her knee in order to ascertain whether she had left her chair, was a huge dark bruise which only gradually disappeared during the next few days, and was at first painful to the touch.

It is much to be hoped that some independent testimony is still in existence regarding these sittings. As it stands, of course, this uncorroborated narrative is of no value as establishing that paranormal events really took place. However, the fact (confirmed by Fournier d'Albe) that Crookes sat for materialization at this late period is of importance as bearing on Trevor Hall's hypothesis that Crookes, had, forty years earlier, taken part in systematic fabrication of fraudulent materialization effects. It may well be thought improbable that one who had been behind the scenes during prolonged periods of cheating, and knew the tricks, would later be so easily taken in by the same kind of effects, or, indeed, would be prepared to take part in such activities.

II. CROOKES'S ATTITUDE TO THE SURVIVAL HYPOTHESIS

A commonly-held belief is that Crookes emerged from his observations of 'Katie King', and other such manifestations, as a convert to the survival hypothesis. It is important when trying to understand Crookes's ideas and motivation to appreciate that, right through the period of his work with the physical mediums, he, like Cox and other prominent investigators, never came to accept the Spiritualist interpretation of the phenomena, although

in their various ways they all believed in the operation of some kind of 'psychic force'. The evolution of Crookes's ideas is shown by the following two letters. The first (published in *The Spiritualist* for June 15, 1871, p. 161) was written early on in his investigations and shows what he hoped to accomplish.

20 Mornington Road, N.W.
May 10th, 1871.

Dear Miss D.,

I think the following expresses the idea which was in my mind the other evening, and which you asked me to put on paper.

Historical testimony is overwhelming as to the fact of communications having been made to mortals from invisible intelligent beings distinct from the human race: and contemporary evidence to similar occurrences is accumulating daily.

The subject can be approached from its sentimental and theological side, or examined in its scientific aspect, and without wishing in the least to disparage the labours of the many earnest enquirers who are pursuing their work under the guidance of their feelings, I think that for my part I am likely to do most good by following the bent of my own intellect, and examining the subject purely in its scientific relations.

From this point of view, it appears to be a matter for legitimate scientific enquiry to ascertain:—

- First: If we have a spirit distinct from the body, and if this can be demonstrated by any other proof than the doubtful and disputable one of revelation?
- Secondly: If so, what is the relationship of spirit to matter; what are its powers when so united, and what are its capabilities when in the free state?
- Thirdly: If distinct intelligent spiritual entities do exist, are they the spirits of dead men, or are they an order of beings separate from the human race?
- Fourthly: Do these intelligent beings communicate with us mortals at the present day; and are they endeavouring to improve the means of communication?

An enquiry of this kind, to be successful, should be undertaken by a man of science, without feeling and without sentiment. All romantic and superstitious ideas should be suppressed and he should be guided by hard intellect alone.

Assuming that there are invisible intelligent beings trying to communicate with us, it is reasonable to suppose that improvements can be made in their mode of telegraphy; and whilst others are obtaining copiously worded communications, I prefer to devote myself to the humbler but not less useful work of acting as telegraphic engineer, endeavouring to improve the instrumental means at this end of the line, to ascertain conditions which will render intercourse more certain, and generally to get the line in a good state of insulation. If these

views are correct every improvement in this respect will react on itself, and will lead to further improvements by facilitating the exchange of ideas and mutual suggestions between the operators at each end.

Believe me, dear Miss D.,

Very sincerely yours,

WILLIAM CROOKES.

The second letter, written to a Madame B., of St Petersburg shortly after the departure of 'Katie King' (May 21, 1874) but not published until 1900 (in *Light* for May 12, p. 223), shows that he was disappointed in his hope of settling the problem of human survival. For the preservation of this very valuable record we are indebted to A. Aksakoff.

20 Mornington Road, London.
August 1st, 1874.

Madame,

Your letter has just reached me. It is with great regret that I can hold out no hope of your receiving the satisfactory proofs you require by any means at my disposal. To 'fix the identity of a deceased person' has been the chief object I have had before me for the last three or four years, and I have neglected no opportunity myself on that point. I have had almost unlimited opportunities of investigation, more so than perhaps any other man in Europe. Mr Home has scarcely given a *seance* in England during his recent visits without my presence at it, and most of his seances have been at my house or at my brother's. For six months Kate Fox was giving seances at my house once or twice a week, and since Christmas last Miss Cook has been almost like one of our family, being here more than at her parents' house, and giving tests and seances several times a week. In addition to these highly-gifted mediums I have had frequent seances with all the other good mediums whose names are familiar to Spiritualists.

During this whole time I have most earnestly desired to get the one proof you seek — the proof that the dead can return and communicate. I have never once had satisfactory proof that this is the case. I have had hundreds of communications *professing* to come from deceased friends, but whenever I try to get proof that they are really the individuals they profess to be, they break down. Not one has been able to answer the necessary questions to prove identity; and the great problem of the future is to me as impenetrable a mystery as ever it was. All I am satisfied of is that there exist invisible intelligent beings, who *profess* to be spirits of deceased people, but the proofs which I require I have never yet had; although I am willing to admit that many of my friends declare that they have actually received the desired proofs, and I myself have been very close to conviction several times.

I cannot, therefore, hold out to you the slightest hope of your questions being satisfactorily answered by any medium who would be

available for me. I do not think such tests are ever obtained unless the person most interested in them — yourself for instance — is likewise present.

The nearest approach to a satisfactory test which I have had, has been through the mediumship of a private lady who developed as a writing medium under my own eye, and who has never sat with anyone else. With her I was getting great hopes that my doubts would have been cleared up; but unfortunately she lost the power.

My opinion is that if you were to sit for writing mediumship with some intimate friend, who would put one hand on yours to control the excess of power, you might get intelligent communications; you would, however, have probably to try several friends before you found the one most suitable.

I am extremely sorry I can give you no more comforting assurances. I have passed through the same frame of mind myself and I know how earnestly the soul craves for one little sign of life beyond the grave.

Your obedient servant,
W. CROOKES.

Crookes's belief in the existence of 'invisible intelligent beings, who *profess* to be spirits of deceased people' but fail to prove their identity, is consistent with his interest in Theosophy. He joined the Theosophical Society in 1883 and remained a member until his death. It will be worth quoting, in this connection, a very interesting passage in a letter¹ from C. C. Massey (an S.P.R. Council member at the Society's inception) to Colonel Olcott, dated December 17, 1875. Massey writes:

I sat next to Crookes at dinner the other night and had a very interesting conversation with him. Indeed neither of us spoke a word to any one else all the time. He is an Occultist, and a pupil of Eliphas Levi, whom he met in Paris. He has himself produced results, but told me that like all profound Occultists there were secrets which he was not permitted to reveal. Is he an initiate in Madame's lodge? Probably not, for he does not appear to believe in *human* spirits and says that Magic is almost altogether bad and dangerous. He asked me much about you and Mme. B. and Felt, to whose work he wishes to subscribe. He is going to write to you, being more interested in finding the similarity of results at which you have both arrived. He excused himself as well as he could for not having written to you earlier and personally acknowledged your book.² I did not conceal from him that you were offended, nor that in my opinion you were rightly so. He told me a good deal about the scandals, but only as regards Miss Showers and himself. The compromising letters I understood him to assert or suggest were forgeries by a fiend who had

¹ Preserved in the Theosophical Archives at Adyar, Madras.

² Presumably *People from the Other World*, American Publishing Company, Hartford, Conn., 1875.

escaped temporarily from his control.¹ He says that Katie King at her last appearance offered to submit to his embraces² but begged him to take no advantage of her which a gentleman should not do — a somewhat ambiguous or inconsistent request which he appears to have construed and complied with with self-restraint in the interests of morality.

Massey's description of Crookes as a 'pupil of Eliphas Levi' is of considerable interest; if it has any basis of truth it would go far to explain Crookes's apparent readiness to accept *non-human* forces and entities in the seance room. Levi's own attitude is made clear in his *La Clef des Grandes Mystères*,³ Baillièrre, Paris, 1861. He discusses D. D. Home's phenomena at some length, and while believing them to be paranormal, he takes a familiar 'occultist' attitude when he insists that they do not originate from deceased human beings.

Though, as we have seen from his letter to Madame B. of St Petersburg, Crookes emerged from his extensive series of tests in the 1870's with his search for evidence of survival unrewarded, it appears that he entered this period convinced of the reality both of survival and communication. In the diary that he kept during the eclipse expedition of 1870 there is an entry for December 31, 1870⁴ in the course of which he refers to what was evidently a seance held the previous year. He writes: 'I cannot help reverting in thought to this time last year. Nelly [Mrs Crookes] and I were then sitting together in communion with dear departed friends, and as 12 o'clock struck they wished us many happy New Years. I feel that they are looking on now, and as space is no obstacle to them, they are, I believe, looking over my dear Nelly at the same time. . . . May He also allow us to continue to receive spiritual communications from my brother who passed over the boundary when in a ship at sea more than three years ago.'

¹ Massey is surely in error here! The 'compromising letters' are evidently those which, in his letter to Home, Crookes asserted to be forged by Mrs Showers. Possibly Massey is confusing two stories, that of the forged letters and that of the 'fiend' whom Crookes believed to have manifested through Florence Cook (see p. 68).

² This, no doubt, refers to the celebrated episode described by Crookes in his *Researches*, 1st edn, p. 106. He says: 'Feeling, however, that if I had not a spirit, I had at all events a *lady* close to me, I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms, so as to be able to verify the interesting observations which a bold experimentalist has recently somewhat verbosely recorded. Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did — well, as any gentleman would do under the circumstances.' This was not, as Massey says, at her *last* appearance, but two months earlier.

³ Translated by Aleister Crowley as *The Key of the Mysteries*, Rider, London, 1959.

⁴ Fournier d'Albe, *The Life of Sir William Crookes*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1923, p. 171.

Late in life Crookes reverted to a belief in survival and communication, though there appear, at least until the episode of the Crewe circle (see p. 124), to have been some reservations in his mind. His letter of condolence on the occasion of Florence Cook's death (see p. 73) is framed in Spiritualistic terms, but he may merely have chosen words which he thought would give the greatest comfort to her relatives. On February 6, 1915, a year before his wife's death, he writes rather cautiously to Sir Oliver Lodge:

Respecting my alleged statement that I had never had a satisfactory proof that the dead can return and communicate, you must bear in mind that the quotation is from a letter said to be written by me in 1874. I do not remember much of my opinions at that date, but I have no doubt the statement was true at that early date.

The implication is that he had obtained proof of some kind *after* 1874, though we have been able to locate no evidence regarding this.

A statement published in *Light* for December 9, 1916, p. 397, is sometimes quoted as representing Crookes's final beliefs. It reads:

Responding to your invitation I have no objection to reaffirm my position on the subject of what are known as psychical phenomena, and to state once more, as I stated in my presidential address to the British Association in 1898, that in regard to the investigations first entered upon by me more than forty years ago, I adhere to my published statements and have nothing to retract. That I have not hitherto considered it necessary to commit myself to any generalisation upon the facts to which I have drawn attention, does not in any way invalidate my testimony regarding the facts themselves. In my opinion they substantiate the claims which have been made for them by several of my colleagues and friends in the Society for Psychical Research, *viz.*, that they point to the existence of another order of human life continuous with this, and demonstrate the possibility in certain circumstances of communication between this world and the next.

WILLIAM CROOKES.
November 28th, 1916

However, this declaration, in fact, was not drawn up by Crookes himself. A letter by Sir Oliver Lodge to the editor of *Light* makes the position clear, and it is of interest in so far as it suggests that there were doubts in Crookes's mind even at that late period. Lodge writes:

Dear Mr Gow,

I think you have done a service in getting a statement from Sir

William Crookes. I have been rather exercised about that myself. Opponents are constantly claiming that he has changed his mind and come up against a brick wall in his investigations, and that that is why he has been so silent. You see his investigations did not touch so directly upon the question of survival as upon physical phenomena of various kinds, materialisations, etc., which might be held to implicate survival but did not demonstrate it in the clear way that has come through since. Hence I never feel quite sure how far he is satisfied with the evidence for survival itself. He inclines to it very strongly no doubt; but ancient scientific scepticism takes a good deal of weakening before it gives way, and is liable to recrudescence at times in a surprising manner.

You will be careful no doubt not to commit him to anything more than he really wishes to be committed to. I wish he could draw it up himself. I expect that we shall not have him long with us.

In a note to me he says that he rather envies me the absolute proof I have obtained about the continued existence of my son. I gather that he rather wishes that he could obtain similar absolute conviction about the continued existence of his wife, with whom he lived over sixty years. But this is not a matter to touch upon in print. I only give it as a sort of caution not to press his beliefs too far.

Yours very truly,
OLIVER LODGE.

Crookes's letter to Lodge on the Crewe phenomena, three weeks later, refers to his 'possession of this definite proof of survival' (see p. 125), and there seems no doubt that at the very end of his life he reached the 'absolute conviction' which Lodge hesitated to attribute to him.

12. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We have tried throughout this paper to avoid the kind of historical clairvoyance that so often features in the writings of the more adventurous historians. As the novelist Josephine Tey penetratingly remarked:¹ 'Only historians tell you what they thought. Research workers stick to what they did.'

In this sense, we regard ourselves as 'research workers' rather than historians, and one of our objectives has been to clear away as many as possible of the spurious accretions contributed by past and present 'historians'.

In the body of the paper we have presented much of the source material with no critical commentary, preferring to reserve our comment until the present section. The provenance of this paper should be sufficient guarantee that we are not recommending un-

¹ 'The Daughter of Time', London, 1951, p. 112.

critical acceptance of the remarkable claims made by the nineteenth-century investigators. In view of Mr Trevor Hall's very selective treatment we have found it necessary to restore the balance by recalling the substantial body of favourable testimony, some of it by observers whose competence and disinterestedness cannot be lightly set aside. Some readers may feel that we have given too much emphasis to the views and reports of those who inclined towards acceptance of the phenomena reported. One purpose, however, that we had constantly in mind was to try to make clear the important difference in psychological atmosphere between opinions nowadays and that current in the last half of the nineteenth century, and this has to a considerable extent motivated our selection of material.

It is, for example, both startling and illuminating, from our present-day viewpoint, to find that a man of the stature of Lord Rayleigh, among the most distinguished of the nineteenth-century physicists, was prepared to take seriously Crookes's suggestion that perhaps the 'spirits' supplied the dress to an unconscious Miss Showers (see p. 107).

It is easy to be misled by a lack of appreciation of this shift in outlook. To take an instructive example, the present-day reader might well feel that he only has to look at the photographs of 'materialisations' (e.g., plates 2 and 4) to see immediately that the phenomena are fraudulent. After all, he may argue, the folds and creases and even the texture of the material are clearly visible. At this point we may suspect that something is wrong. Why was this obvious fraud not apparent to the investigators at the time? Were not Crookes and Lodge and Myers as capable of looking at a photograph as we are?

In fact, Crookes and his colleagues would have been disconcerted if they had viewed the photographs and *not* seen the creases. What has become overlooked in the course of time is that the investigators never believed other than that the 'spirit drapery' was indistinguishable from cloth or similar material, capable of being handled, cut, and on occasions preserved after the seance. There was no question at all of a textureless 'ectoplasm'. Crookes would have been quite out of sympathy with Harry Price's assumption that the Helen Duncan drapery had to be cheese-cloth or something similar imported into the seance room, merely because photographs revealed the 'cloth' texture.¹

This very material nature of the drapery is repeatedly stressed in the contemporary accounts. Harrison quotes Florence's

¹ 'Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship', Bulletin 1, National Laboratory of Psychical Research, London, 1931.

'Katie' as saying that 'she makes this drapery out of matter obtained from the dresses of all the sitters in the circle'.¹ Four years later we find Kate Cook's 'Lillie Gordon' saying the same thing with additional detail in a long dissertation given ostensibly by 'direct writing'.² Though, at the present day, we would consider such assertions very far-fetched, there can be little doubt that Crookes and his contemporaries would not have found them unacceptable.

In a letter to Blackburn, dated May 11, 1874, Crookes remarks: 'Afterwards Katie cut pieces from her dress and gave them to some who were present.' An even more remarkable statement is attributed to him by Lord Lytton. Lord Lytton, the son of the famous novelist, was a fellow guest with William Crookes at Terling, Lord Rayleigh's country seat, in September 1891. Lord Lytton had a considerable interest in Spiritualism and, as the fourth Baron Rayleigh says in his description of this meeting, 'Crookes, encouraged by the presence of a sympathetic listener, expanded more than he was wont'.³ The next day Lytton sent a long account of the conversation to Mrs Maria Theresa Earle.⁴ It seems likely that his reporting is accurate, since Crookes's stories, as Lytton recounts them, of phenomena observed with Kate Fox, and of an electrical test with an unnamed medium (clearly Eva Fay) are in close agreement with the original published versions, of which Lytton seemed to be unaware.

Lytton showed particular interest in the problem of the 'spirit drapery'. He says:

Again, during the period of the spirit's (i.e. 'Katie King's') visitations, which lasted only three years and were then of a daily occurrence, he (Crookes) frequently cut large pieces, with her permission, out of her dress, and no sooner were they cut out than the holes thus made closed up under his eyes, and the cut pieces were replaced apparently by a spontaneous formation of exactly the same stuff without any seam or discernible joining. I asked him if he still had the cut out pieces, and he said yes, numbers of them, and that they were all of a very poor kind of cotton greatly adulterated in the manufacture.⁵

¹ *The Spiritualist*, December 12, 1873, p. 452.

² *The Spiritualist*, January 11, 1878, p. 15.

³ *Life of John William Strutt, Third Baron Rayleigh*, O.M. by Robert John Strutt, Fourth Baron Rayleigh, F.R.S., London, 1924, p. 265. Lord Rayleigh (the fourth Baron) adds: 'He (i.e. Crookes) said something to the effect that he was usually reticent about it because he did not like being taken for a knave or a fool.'

⁴ *Memoirs and Memories* by Mrs C. W. Earle, London, 1911, pp. 381-5.

⁵ Crookes's insistence on the solid and permanent nature of the 'materialised' fabric is all of a piece with his general view of the phenomena. We know from Lord Lytton's letter and elsewhere, that 'materialised' locks of hair cut from

It may, of course, be argued that this took place during the 'Katie King' period when poor Crookes's judgment was (according to Mr Hall) overwhelmed by his 'infatuation' for Florence. But wonders were just as prevalent before and after the advent of 'Katie'. Crookes's *Researches*, for example, includes his description of a 'direct writing' episode during a D. D. Home sitting in the light, in the course of which a pencil perambulated solo, on its point, to a sheet of paper and, failing to write, summoned a 'small wooden lath' which advanced to the pencil, rose up, and offered itself as a support.¹ In the end, even with the assistance of the lath, the pencil failed to write and Crookes described the experiment as a 'failure'!

We offer another example which is instructive as illustrating the difference between Crookes's attitude and ours today on the standards of reporting necessary for events of such an unlikely nature. In the *Researches* (1874 ed., p. 94) he tells us:

The following is a still more striking instance [of materialisation]. As in the former case, Mr Home was the medium. A phantom form came from a corner of the room, took an accordion in its hand, and then glided about the room playing the instrument. The form was visible to all present for many minutes, Mr Home also being seen at the same time. Coming rather close to a lady who was sitting apart from the rest of the company, she gave a slight cry, upon which it vanished.

One might have thought this remarkable event to have been of such high evidential importance as to have demanded the most careful documentation. On the contrary, it is thrown out in the most casual manner; no date or names of sitters are given, and even the location is not revealed. By a stroke of fortune that Crookes could not have foreseen, Stainton Moses recorded this information in his private note-book, and his account of the sitting was published much later by Myers (*Proceedings S.P.R.*, 9, 1893-4, p. 309). The date turns out to have been May 7, 1873 (ten months before Crookes's first report on Florence Cook's phenomena), the house that of Miss Douglas, 81, South Audley Street, London, and the sitters (besides Home) were Mrs Home, Crookes and his wife, Sergeant Cox, Miss Douglas and Stainton Moses. The lady who cried out was Mrs Crookes. Moses makes no mention of the

'Katie King's' head were preserved by Crookes and others: one of them is still in existence in the Britten Memorial Library. And in a letter to Sir Oliver Lodge (now in the Lodge collection) dated March 9, 1910, Crookes says: 'I think if I had run a knife into K. K. [i.e. 'Katie King'] she would have called out and bled, and a microscopic examination of her blood might have shown it to be like human blood.'

¹ *Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 93.

playing of the accordion by the 'phantom form', but Mrs Crookes, at Myers's request (and presumably with Crookes's knowledge and acquiescence), gave in 1893 an account which substantially follows that of Crookes but with much added detail. After her cry and the subsequent disappearance of the apparition, which sank 'into the floor to the waist, leaving only the head and shoulders visible, still playing the accordion, which was then about a foot off the floor', she reports Sergeant Cox as exclaiming: 'Mrs Crookes, you have spoilt the finest manifestation we have ever had.'

Crookes's astonishingly casual reporting of such events is characteristic of almost all of his writings on psychical matters in this period. Present-day workers in this field are painfully aware that, whatever their eminence, their unsupported word will carry little weight. Not so Crookes. Replying to his critics, he writes (*Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 22): 'Others — and I am glad to say they are very few — have gone so far as to question my veracity: "Mr Crookes must get better witnesses before he can be believed!" Accustomed as I am to have my word believed without witnesses, this is an argument which I cannot condescend to answer.'

Trevor Hall, in a recent article,¹ insists, as he did in his book, that a highly suspicious circumstance of the Florence Cook sittings was 'Crookes's concealment of the names of all the other persons at the sittings who might have corroborated the carefully controlled observations'. But such a contention must surely be based on ignorance of Crookes's general practice in these matters. The so-called 'concealment' is to be found as much in the reports of work with Eva Fay, Kate Fox and, for the most part, D. D. Home as with Florence. It was in fact not until 1889, in his paper *Notes of seances with D. D. Home* (*S.P.R. Proceedings*, 6, p. 98) that Crookes, doubtless under the influence of his S.P.R. colleagues, published the kind of data that would now be considered essential. In private correspondence at the time of the sittings Crookes had no hesitation in naming the sitters (as can be seen in a letter he sent to Blackburn on May 11, 1874), and this surely makes it somewhat absurd to assert that he *concealed* this information.

A point that cannot be too much stressed is that the phenomena attested by Crookes over six years and in hundreds of sittings are very much of a piece. The marvels of Florence Cook no more strain one's credulity than do other marvels of D. D. Home, Kate Fox, Charles Williams and Mrs Eva Fay. If Florence's 'Katie', with her self-repairing drapery and her 'direct writing', strikes us

¹ Trevor H. Hall, 'Florence Cook and William Crookes: a footnote to an enquiry,' *Tomorrow*, Vol. 11, Autumn, 1963, p. 341.

as transparent nonsense, so, surely, should Home's 'phantom form', playing the accordion as it glided round the room. And so should Mrs Fay's 'double' dressed just like Mrs Fay, handing out miscellaneous objects through the gap in the seance room curtains while (we are asked to believe) Mrs Fay sat quietly in her chair (see p. 103). And yet so distinguished a witness as Lord Rayleigh appears to have remained satisfied with the experimental conditions under which this unlikely event occurred.¹

It is only by suppressing a great deal of evidence that it can be made to seem that the 'Katie King' phenomena were so different in kind from the rest of Crookes's attested experiences as to force us to postulate some special motivation leading him to have sponsored fraud in that one series of sittings. If he was in fact systematically deceiving his public and his colleagues during all those years, the motive is surely to be sought not in an isolated sexual adventure, as Mr Trevor Hall suggests, but rather in some form of megalomania: in, perhaps, a vision of himself as the Newton of a vast new realm of scientific endeavour. A certain support for this view is given by his failure to make known, except to his immediate friends,² the facts about Miss Showers's reprehensible behaviour, and the reason he gave to D. D. Home for this failure (see p. 114). He appears to have regarded himself as the custodian of vital knowledge the public image of which would be tarnished were Miss Showers's delinquences to be made generally known. Looking back, we can see that by withholding this information Crookes was merely postponing the eventuality that he feared. Repeated exposures of prominent mediums, over the next decade or two, brought the practice of physical mediumship into a disrepute from which it has never recovered.

Mr Trevor Hall has given great weight to what he regards as the evidence for a liaison between Crookes and Florence Cook. In an

¹ Even after many years Rayleigh had not, it seems, changed his mind regarding the validity of this test. Lord Lytton, in the 1891 letter mentioned earlier, says: 'They [i.e. Crookes and Lord and Lady Rayleigh] aver that if for a single instant the medium had removed either of her hands from the handle, its removal must instantly have been indicated by the movements of the galvanometer . . . in the next room, yet while the galvanometer remained perfectly motionless, books were thrown out of the bookcase and all the furniture upset in the dark room.'

² It is of considerable interest that Myers may have been one of these. Myers, in one of his papers on the Stainton Moses mediumship, made the positive statement, concerning Moses, that 'once at least he was convinced by a manifestation afterwards absolutely proved to be fraudulent' (*S.P.R. Proceedings*, 9, p. 255). It seems distinctly possible that this statement by Myers was based on a knowledge of Miss Showers's confession. Moses was certainly impressed by one Showers seance (see *Light*, Spring, 1963, p. 26), and no other mediumistic occurrences described in the Moses notebooks seem quite to fit so strong a description as 'absolutely proved to be fraudulent'.

article¹ that appeared after the major part of the present paper had been written, Hall complains that in two reviews of his book no mention is made of some adverse comments by three of Crookes's contemporaries, cited in *The Spiritualists*, and that one of the reviewers omits mention of a somewhat fanciful inference that Hall draws from a Byron stanza quoted by Crookes. The three contemporary statements, the Byron stanza, and the 'Anderson testimony' form the whole of the concrete evidence for the alleged liaison. The Byron verse and Hall's deductions from it have been discussed at some length by Dr Thouless,² and need not detain us here. The Anderson testimony has also come under much discussion.³ We comment briefly on it in an Appendix.

The contemporary statements seem to us rather more in the nature of gossip than of substantial testimony, and for that reason we have deferred discussion of them until this concluding section. One, by J. N. Maskelyne, the conjuror, appeared in an amusing but not very substantial book called *Modern Spiritualism* (Frederick Warne, London, 1876), the accounts in which are not based on first hand experience. Another was by the Rev. C. M. Davies, who occupied himself with journalism and had spiritualist leanings, in an article printed in the *Daily Telegraph* and reissued in his book *Mystic London* (Tinsley Bros., London, 1875). In this article he quotes the account of an anonymous person who claimed to have been at one of the final 'Katie King' sittings held in Hackney between April 30 and May 21, 1874, and who described Crookes as 'exciting suspicion by his marked attentions, not to the medium, but to the ghost'. We feel reluctant to attach importance to anonymous testimony of this kind. It should perhaps be mentioned that, although Davies clearly states that he is quoting a friend's story, Hall prefers to believe that the experience was Davies's own. It is not easy to see how this can be so, since the names of the sitters at this series of seances are available in published or unpublished accounts (and are given almost completely by Hall in Chapter 3 of his book), and Davies was not present at any of them.

The remaining contemporary account cited by Hall has somewhat more substance in that we do at least know the identity of the author. This was a Mr J. Enmore Jones, a Spiritualist, who in a letter⁴ describing the seance of May 16, 1874, remarked:

¹ Trevor H. Hall, 'Florence Cook and William Crookes: a footnote to an enquiry.' *Tomorrow*, Vol. 11, Autumn, 1963, p. 341.

² *Journal of Parapsychology*, Vol. 27, June 1963, pp. 134-5; and *S.P.R. Journal*, 42, December 1963, p. 205.

³ *S.P.R. Journal*, 41, pp. 376, 388-92; 42, pp. 93-7, 140-4, 203-4; and *Journal of Parapsychology*, Vol. 27, June 1963, pp. 126-32.

⁴ *The Medium and Daybreak*, May 22, 1874, p. 327.

The leader [evidently Crookes] stood in front of the awning, and made himself very active every time that 'Katie' appeared; stooping down to, or with face almost touching the face of 'Katie'; physically, and unscientifically, hampering all her movements, so as in several instances to compel the spirit with her hand to knock the face away from her, though done in a playful manner; reminding me of a fussy mesmeriser, who suddenly finding himself in office desires to show himself off to the audience,

In view of the intrigues, suspicions and hostilities that existed among the investigators, the spiritualists and the mediums (see, for example, Luxmoore's letter, p. 119, and Lady Crookes's letter, p. 116), one hardly knows what credence to give to this report without knowing more of Enmore Jones's position. The mannerisms that he found objectionable may, allowing for possible exaggeration on his part, have been no more than what Myers (see p. 94) referred to as 'the manner in which Crookes, deliberately and very successfully, has thought it best to adopt, in order to set "mediums" at ease', in this case extended to the 'apparition'.

In the article in the journal *Tomorrow*, cited above, Trevor Hall raises two others issues that call for brief comment. We shall not follow in detail his discussion of Mrs Crookes's letter on the 'Leila' manifestations (see p. 69), since much of it consists of restatement as fact of various unproven conjectures from his book (such as the assertion that Blackburn had 'suspicions of an adulterous association between Florence and Crookes'). He does, however, pose one question that seems worth consideration. This is:

'Why, if the ultimate proof of the separate identity of the medium and the materialization had been obtained by their [i.e. Florence's and Leila's] joint emergence from the cabinet, did Crookes not triumphantly prepare the report himself and silence his critics for ever by documenting it with signed, independent accounts from the alleged unnamed observers who had also witnessed these miracles?'

A rather obvious answer is that Mrs Crookes did not, in fact, claim that independent observers had 'witnessed these miracles', only that visitors were present when the seances were not so successful (see the final sentence of her letter). It has also to be borne in mind that Crookes had much earlier made his big effort to induce the uncommitted scientific world to witness physical mediumistic phenomena, with a disheartening lack of success. As he said in a letter to Sir Oliver Lodge dated October 20, 1894,

It seems a cruel thing that Home was about London for years, asking for scientific men to come and investigate, and offering himself

freely for any experiments they liked, and with one or two exceptions no one would take advantage of the offer. I tried my best to get men of science to look into it, but all I got for my pains was a suggestion of lunacy for myself, and insults for Home.¹

There seems no difficulty in presuming that, by the middle of 1875, Crookes would have felt no strong temptation to court further suggestions of lunacy by pressing claims which, it seems, would have rested largely on the unsupported word of his wife and himself.

The other of Trevor Hall's suggestions that is worth brief mention concerns Crookes's letters to D. D. Home regarding Rosina Showers (see p. 113 *et seq.*). Hall gives an inadequate précis of this correspondence and, perhaps predictably, proposes that Crookes was carrying on a 'liaison, or an attempted liaison' with Rosina, and that in that event he was a 'liar and a pursuer of young women'. This kind of treatment of the evidence is something of a slippery slope. Having decided, on grounds far from conclusive, that Crookes was Florence Cook's lover, it then becomes almost mandatory to attach a sinister significance to the evidence concerning Rosina. This theme could be developed almost indefinitely. We have, for example, heard it suggested, apparently in all seriousness, that Crookes was Eva Fay's lover, that Signor Rondi was Kate Cook's lover, and even that Dr Gully was the lover of Florence's mother and Florence's true father!

The question of Crookes's competence as an observer is, of course, of vital importance. It will have become apparent that he had supreme confidence in his own critical powers and he had no hesitation in demanding that his readers share this confidence. The unfortunate consequence is, as we have already noted, that his reports, by modern standards, are woefully inadequate and give insufficient basis for forming a judgment on his experimental competence. It is certainly hard not to feel as one reads his narratives that the phenomena are often too unambiguous for him to have been mistaken. In, for example, a letter to Blackburn dated May 11, 1874, he describes a seance in Hackney, held on May 9 in the presence of Dr and Mrs Speer and others, in the course of which he saw 'Katie' and Florence together under conditions such as would make it seem impossible that he could have been deceived. And yet, all we are told of the precautions taken is contained in the one sentence: 'Before she went into the back parlour, now used as a cabinet, I examined the room and fastened the window and side door myself.' We are left to infer

¹ Cf. a similar statement in the *S.P.R. Journal*, 6, p. 345.

the adequacy of the search and the fastening. Crookes himself poured scorn on such doubts when he exclaimed: 'Will not my critics give me credit for the possession of some amount of common sense? And can they not imagine that obvious precautions, which occur to them as soon as they sit down to pick holes in my experiments, are not unlikely to have also occurred to me in the course of prolonged and patient investigation?'¹ Nevertheless, one cannot but feel that some description of the pedestrian details of securing and searching would have been reassuring!

Crookes's account of his experiment with the Crewe circle (see p. 124) may be thought to be disquieting in this connection. His positive statement in his first letter to Lodge that the photographic plate did not leave his possession is shown in his second letter to have been without foundation, and it is not made clear whether, or how carefully, he examined the camera. In view of the subsequent unhappy history of 'psychic photography', it would seem likely that his confident belief that he was 'acquainted with all the dodges possible' led him on this occasion into error. However, he was then in his eighty-fourth year and suffering the stress of the recent death of his wife. It would be unsafe to make any inference as to his judgment forty years earlier.

As regards Crookes's investigation of Florence Cook, it is certain that he had many more sittings with her than are recorded, as is shown by his statement, quoted on p. 106, that he had between thirty and forty sittings with her before he felt justified in coming to a positive opinion. And in his letter to 'Madame B', quoted on p. 129, he claimed that he had had 'almost unlimited opportunities of investigation, more so than perhaps any other man in Europe'. Certainly he cannot be accused of forming a judgment on insufficient experience! We might quote his own words here, from a letter he wrote dated May 24, 1871, to John Spiller, a former colleague who had suggested that Crookes had been too hasty in accepting certain psychical phenomena:

Good heavens! One of us must have strangely altered before advice like that could pass between us. Have I ever shown haste in forming an opinion? Have I ever admitted a new fact in science on insufficient testimony? Have I not rather shown undue caution in requiring that every step of an investigation should be probed in the most absolute and irrefragable manner before believing it to be true? Have I, in all the years you have known me, made one false step in science, or had to withdraw a single statement? Have I not ground and winnowed and sifted evidence to such a degree that along with the bad I have thrown away much of the good because it was not good enough, and

¹ *Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 43.

only held firm to the small residuum of absolute truth? And now I am asked *to sift evidence* . . . and I can still sign myself
Your old friend,
WILLIAM CROOKES¹

Nor did time alter Crookes's judgment. In his Presidential Address to the British Association in 1898, when after the passage of more than twenty years he could well have refrained from reminding his hearers of these old controversies, he chose to speak of them once more and declare:

I have nothing to retract. I adhere to my already published statements. Indeed, I might add much thereto. I regret only a certain crudity in those early expositions which, no doubt justly, militated against their acceptance by the scientific world.²

The proposition that during his five year investigation Crookes sponsored and, perhaps, aided a multitude of spurious manifestations,³ would be easier to accept if his was the only prolonged series of apparently successful demonstrations of these phenomena. If, apart from Crookes's researches, only isolated experiences had been reported, these might well be dismissed as the deception of tyros by skilled tricksters. Crookes's claim to have witnessed these phenomena repeatedly under conditions controlled by himself would then remain as a very suspect anomaly.

However, Crookes was by no means the only observer who claimed to have witnessed the phenomena of physical mediumship over a long period. One striking instance is the prolonged run of sittings in which Stainton Moses acted as the physical medium attested, among others, by Dr Speer and his wife. These took place more or less coincidentally with those sponsored by Crookes. They reproduce all the major phenomena described by Crookes. Levitation, materialization, production of 'spirit drapery', passage of matter through matter: all are claimed to have been repeatedly witnessed under good conditions. Myers, in two long papers in *Proceedings*⁴ analyses in great detail the status, judgment and credibility of the principal witnesses, some of whom he knew well, and he leaves us in no doubt of his own opinion. In the first paper he writes:⁵

¹ Quoted in Fournier d'Albe's biography of Crookes, p. 200.

² *Researches*, 1926 & 1953 editions, p. 130.

³ The general question of Crookes's complicity in fraud has been discussed at length by Dr Thouless in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, Vol. 27, June 1963; and also in *S.P.R. Journal*, 42, Dec. 1963.

⁴ *Proceedings*, 9, pp. 245-353, and 11, pp. 24-113.

⁵ *Proceedings*, 9, p. 254.

The evidence for all the incidents is practically the same:—the whole group of witnesses are as fully pledged, say, to the falling of pearls from the air as to the automatic script or the trance-phenomena, I at least can see no *via media* which can be plausibly taken. The permanent fraud of the whole group, or the substantial accuracy of all the records, are the only hypotheses which seem to me capable of covering the facts. At any rate, before discussing the point, I propose to quote at sufficient length to allow my readers to form their own judgment. My only personal contribution to the data before us lies in my somewhat confident impression that my friends whom I am thus frankly discussing are and were in the habit of speaking the truth.

In the second paper Myers states his conviction without equivocation. He writes:¹

That [the phenomena] were not produced fraudulently by Dr Speer or other sitters I regard as proved both by moral considerations and by the fact that they are constantly reported as occurring when Mr Moses was alone. That Mr Moses should have himself fraudulently produced them I regard as both morally and physically incredible. That he should have prepared and produced them in a state of trance I regard both as physically incredible and also as entirely inconsistent with the tenor both of his own reports and of those of his friends. I therefore regard the reported phenomena as having actually occurred in a genuinely supernatural way.

Even had the Crookes investigations never taken place, the Stainton Moses sittings would still have presented a very real puzzle. Taking the two together, it is at least clear that if a massive deception took place in the 1870's no one person, Crookes or any other, can have been 'master-minding' it. As with C. E. M. Hansel's recent postulated scheme of cheating in the Shackleton experiments,² the fraud hypothesis appears to demand that an almost unbelievable number of apparently respectable people must have been involved in fraudulent practice.

To take an example nearer to our own time, one cannot but be impressed by the circumstances in which the Naples Committee on Eusapia Palladino produced its favourable report. This Committee, consisting of Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally and Hereward Carrington, was sent by the Society to Naples in 1909 to investigate Eusapia. They went with full knowledge of Eusapia's previous record of trickery, as recorded by Sidgwick, Myers and Hodgson in Cambridge in 1895. They were all men with great experience of fraudulent mediumship and one of them was an expert conjuror. All three were at that time sceptical concerning

¹ *Proceedings*, II, p. 24.

² *Proceedings*, 53, May 1960.



Plate 1. Florence Cook, 1874 (photographer B. J. Edwards, Hackney)



Plate 2. 'Katie King', 1874 (photographer probably Crookes)

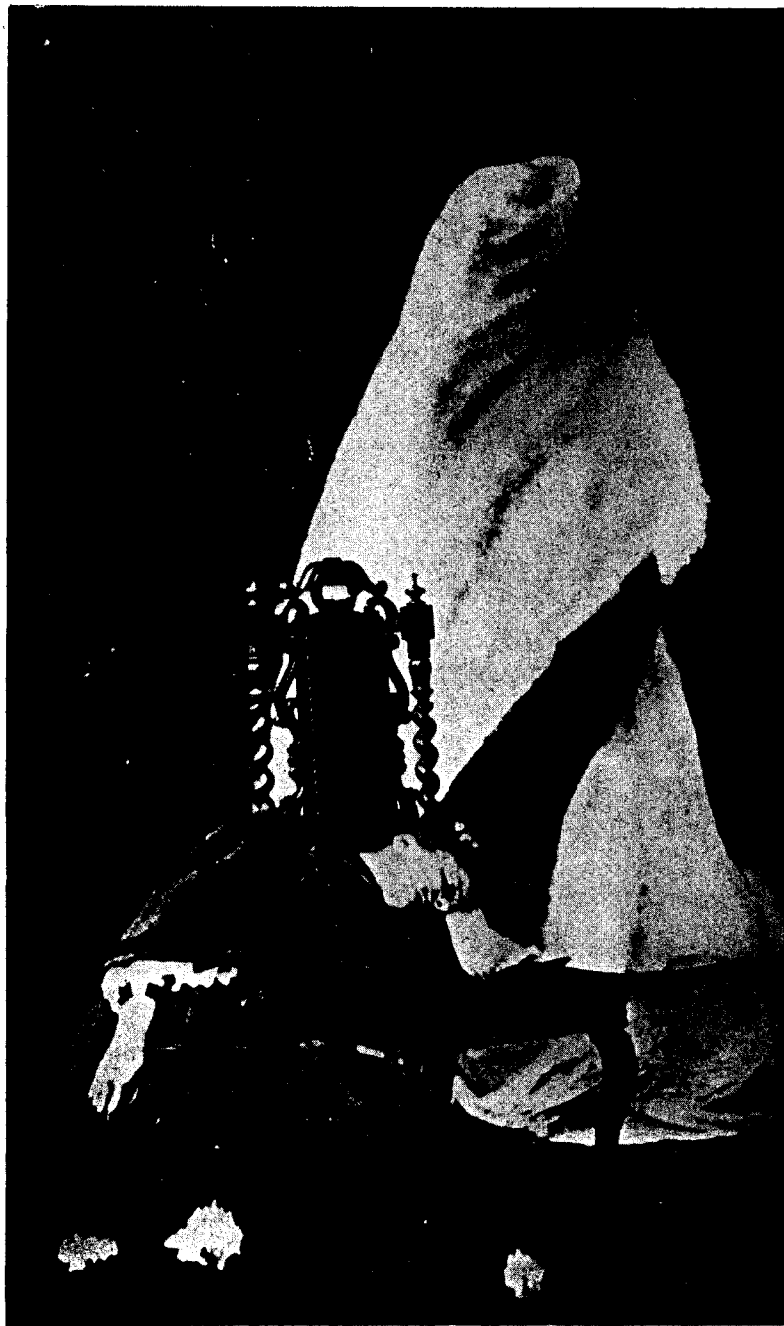


Plate 3. Florence Cook in trance, with 'spirit form' behind, 1874 (*photographer probably Crookes*)



Plate 4. 'Materialised spirit form' (presumably 'Marie') at a sitting with Florence Cook, c. 1902 (*photographer Mr Searle, Stockport*)



Plate 5. 'Spirit photograph' taken in Crewe, showing alleged image of Lady Crookes, December, 1916 (photographer William Hope: Crookes's plate, developed by him)

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The Physical Phenomena

the validity of physical phenomena. It is interesting to note that Baggally, in particular, had sat repeatedly with some of the best known nineteenth-century mediums, including Florence Cook, and had been quite unimpressed.¹ Eusapia's phenomena were admittedly not of such an extreme nature as much that was claimed for the materialization mediums of the '70's. Nevertheless it is remarkable, and must influence our estimate of the probability or otherwise of the claims of the nineteenth-century investigators, that in these circumstances such sceptical and experienced investigators brought back a favourable verdict on what they had personally seen, including materialization phenomena.

It does not detract from the weight of this verdict that subsequently they had a further series of seances with Eusapia in which they saw nothing convincingly supernormal, and much that was probably fraudulent. As Sir William Barrett remarked:²

Every one who has had much experience in these perplexing investigations knows that what seems purposeless and stupid fraud often intrudes itself, after the most conclusive evidence of genuine phenomena has been obtained. It is this which renders the whole enquiry wholly unfitted for the hasty and unskilled investigator.

If the phenomena did not run so counter to the whole body of normal experience, there would probably be little doubt which way our judgment would go. Even though, as Crookes himself admitted, almost all of the mediums he sponsored were sometimes guilty of fraud,³ his precautions were apparently so thorough, his witnesses often so impressive, and the effects, as reported, so far beyond the possibility of counterfeiting, that in the normal way we should have little hesitation in saying that the case is proved beyond reasonable doubt. But such is the nature of the seance-room phenomena of D. D. Home, Florence Cook, Charles Williams, Stainton Moses and the rest, that we cannot postulate their authenticity, even in part, without supposing that, at a certain period of history, many men were repeatedly witnessing events which defy both physical law and common sense. If a 'poor kind of cotton' could materialize and heal itself when cut, if pencils could write unsupported, there is nothing inherently absurd in the whole range of the nineteenth-century Spiritualist phenomena. As well, we must admit, could an authentic 'Lillie Gordon' have written genuine spirit letters to Blackburn, as could a translucent

¹ Obituary notice of W. W. Baggally, *S.P.R. Journal*, 24, p. 276.

² *On the Threshold of the Unseen*, by Sir William Barrett, F.R.S., Kegan Paul, London, 1917, p. 318.

³ See p. 50.

apparition produced by D. D. Home have played the accordion while sinking into the floor up to its armpits, as Mrs Crookes testified.

The investigators themselves were well aware of the dilemma. Crookes, in his *Researches*,¹ said:

The phenomena I am prepared to attest are so extraordinary and so directly oppose the most firmly rooted articles of scientific belief — amongst others, the ubiquity and invariable action of the force of gravitation — that, even now, on recalling the details of what I witnessed, there is an antagonism in my mind between *reason* which pronounces it to be scientifically impossible, and the consciousness that my senses, both of touch and sight — and those corroborated, as they were, by the senses of all who were present — are not lying witnesses when they testify against my preconceptions.

Some fifty years later, Professor Charles Richet, the world-renowned physiologist (and S.P.R. President 1905), apologized publicly to Crookes for his former ridicule and confirmed all that Crookes had claimed for the phenomena of materialization. He wrote:

'The idolatry of current ideas was so dominant at that time that no pains were taken either to verify or to refute Crookes's statement. Men were content to ridicule them, and I avow with shame that I was among the wilfully blind . . . I laughed.'² 'I was absolutely sure that Crookes must have fallen into some terrible error. And so was Ochorowicz. But he repented, and said, as I do, smiting my breast, 'Pater, peccavi!'³

Nor was Richet behind Crookes in claiming the same care in conducting his experiments: 'Having seen many materialisations . . . my only preoccupation, and one that filled my whole being, was always not to be duped.'⁴

His assertions were so emphatic that we may be forgiven for quoting further:

Assuredly we do not understand it [i.e. materialisation]. It is very absurd, if a truth can be absurd.

Spiritualists have blamed me for using this word 'absurd'; and have not been able to understand that to admit the reality of these phenomena was to me an actual pain; but to ask a physiologist, a physicist, or a chemist to admit that a form that has a circulation of blood, warmth and muscles, that exhales carbonic acid, has weight, speaks,

¹ *Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 82.

² *Traité de Métapsychique* (Alcan, Paris, 1922), translated from the French by Stanley de Brath, M.Inst.C.E., as *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* (Collins, London, 1923), p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

and thinks, can issue from a human body is to ask of him an intellectual effort that is really painful.

Yes, it is absurd; but no matter — it is true.¹

Elsewhere in the same volume Richet remarks:

The alternative . . . is that the phenomena are genuine or that they are due to fraud. I am very well aware that they are extraordinary, even so monstrously extraordinary that at first sight the hypothesis of immeasurable, repeated, and continual fraud seems the more probable explanation. But is such fraud possible? I cannot think so. When I recall the precautions that all of us have taken, not once, but twenty, a hundred, or even a thousand times, it is inconceivable that we should have been deceived on all these occasions.²

Professor Challis, of Cambridge, had put the same point even more strongly. Crookes³ quotes him as saying:

In short, the testimony has been so abundant and consentaneous, that either the facts must be admitted to be such as are reported, or the possibility of certifying facts by human testimony must be given up.

The problem has receded into history and for whatever reason such phenomena are no longer available for study. Is it too much to hope that a physical medium may still appear in the future who would be willing to offer himself for examination with the improved experimental method now available, i.e., the infra-red 'viewer' for seeing in darkness? If this could be successfully applied, he or she might claim the distinction of bringing about a final decision in the controversy concerning the physical phenomena of mediumship. But should this 'consummation devoutly to be wished' not be vouchsafed to us, the modern reader is left to make up his mind as best he can on the basis of the written record, and this we have attempted to present as completely as possible, within the necessarily restricted scope of a paper such as this, in so far as it bears on Crookes's part in these strange events.

Was Crookes duped? — and by a succession of mediums, not all of them, as Mr Hall appears to think, young and attractive girls. Were Crookes, Richet, and all the numerous otherwise competent scientists who attested similar phenomena, taken in by tricksters? Or are we to believe that they, and we, in approaching the phenomena of psychical research cross over an 'enchanted boundary', postulated by Dr W. F. Prince⁴ in a very different sense, in which we suffer hallucinations unmatched elsewhere in the domain of the sane, and become veritably bewitched?

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 543-4.

³ *Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 32.

² *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁴ S.P.R. President, 1930-1.

The more I reflect... the more I am persuaded that we know absolutely nothing of the universe which surrounds us. We live in a sort of dream and have not yet understood anything of the agitations and tumults of this dream.¹

APPENDIX

CROOKES'S 'KATIE KING' PHOTOGRAPHS

According to Crookes (*Researches*, 1874 ed., p. 108), 'Katie' appeared at his house 'almost nightly', during the week before her final departure on May 21, 1874, to enable him to photograph her by artificial light. He tells us that at the end of that period he had 'forty-four negatives, some inferior, some indifferent, and some excellent'.

James Burns says of these:

A long series of photographs of 'Katie' were shown taken in a variety of attitudes, some of them very expressive and classical, and all of them beautiful specimens of photographic art by means of the electric light.

(*The Medium and Daybreak*, March 12, 1875, p. 162.)

In 1874 a Mr J. Hawkins Simpson made a portrait of 'Katie' based on some of the photographs. Crookes, in answer to an enquiry from Mr Simpson, gave some interesting details on the lighting arrangements. He wrote (*The Spiritual Review*, London, Vol. III, May 1901):

Knowing from experience how dreadfully hard photos taken by electric light were, I tried all ways of softening and illuminating the shadows. I had electric light on one side and magnesium on the other, moving. White sheets were also hung about the room to reflect the light. The exposure was about three seconds.

It is by no means certain that the photographs of 'Katie' still in existence (e.g., that reproduced as plate 2) are among the ones regarded by Crookes as 'excellent', or even whether they are all by Crookes. It is known that Harrison, at least, also photographed 'Katie' by artificial light. Certainly the extant photographs would hardly qualify as 'beautiful specimens of photographic art'. Simpson's portrait, which presumably followed the photographs reasonably accurately, appears not to have been quite like any of the photographs that we have seen. Simpson describes his portrait in these words:

¹ Richet.
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Katie is standing with closed eyes, in white robe, cut low, and short sleeves, a thin white head-dress falls over the shoulders without concealing the loose ringlets of amber coloured hair. The arms are crossed below the bare bosom, in which is a bouquet of lilies and maiden hair fern.

In subsequent letters to Simpson, Crookes wrote that he had displayed Simpson's portrait in his library during July 1874, asking for criticism from all who knew 'Katie'; a letter from Crookes to Simpson dated July 20 gives the consensus of 'very numerous' criticisms. If 'Katie', in Crookes's house, was in fact Florence in a sheet, it is indeed a curious situation that many witnesses, in the cold light of day, should analyse in detail the accuracy of the portrait's likeness to 'Katie', sometimes, it seems, in the presence of Florence herself. It would be of very great interest if a copy of this portrait could be traced.

It has never been clear what motivated Crookes in withholding publication of the 'Katie' photographs during his lifetime. What have survived are a few, poor quality prints of obscure origin. His attitude to publication is expressed, but not explained, in a letter to a Captain T. D. Williams, written on August 4, 1874. The original was in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Psychic Museum, and was probably lost when most of the contents were destroyed by flood. It reads:

It was at the express wish of Katie King and is also that of Miss Cook and myself that the photographs I took should be kept strictly private and only given to intimate friends. If, however, you will not allow the picture to be circulated or copied in any way, and will consider it quite private, I shall have great pleasure in begging your acceptance of the one I enclose.

We conclude with a brief note on the photograph of a very late Florence 'manifestation', which we reproduce as plate 4. This was taken by flashlight in about 1902, two years before Florence's death, by a Mr Searle, a professional photographer of Stockport. It is reproduced in *Psychic Science* for January 1927. The gentleman, one of the sitters, is not named in the accompanying note by Mr A. W. Orr in the same journal. A remark by Mr Orr gives an interesting impression of Florence's appearance at this time. He says:

I was present an evening or two before that on which the photograph was taken, and saw the form of the tall slim young woman that appears in the picture; Mrs Corner being short, rather stout, and of darker complexion than the spirit-lady.

Florence's two daughters would then be in their twenties, and it

would consequently be interesting to know whether either of them accompanied their mother to Stockport.

CHRONOLOGY

The following abbreviations are used:

William Crookes (WC)	'Katie King' (KK)
Florence Cook (FC)	'Lily Gordon' (LG)
Kate Cook (KC)	'Florence Maple' (FM)
Charles Blackburn (CB)	<i>The Spiritualist</i> (S)
Rosina Showers (RS)	<i>The Medium and Daybreak</i> (MD)
D. D. Home (DDH)	<i>The Quarterly Journal of Science</i> (QJS)

- 1832 Birth of William Crookes.
- 1856 Marriage of WC and Ellen Humphrey.
Birth of Florence Eliza Cook on 3 June.
- 1859 Birth of Kate Cook.
- 1863 WC elected Fellow of the Royal Society.
- 1864 WC joint editor of the new QJS (later sole editor).
- 1867 Death of WC's brother Philip (aged 21) to whom he was much attached. Cromwell Varley interests him in spiritualist methods of 'communication' with the dead.
- 1869 WC begins his investigation of psychic phenomena. In later years he states, 'I have had almost unlimited opportunities of investigation, more so than perhaps any other man in Europe.'
- 1870 WC's article *Spiritualism Viewed by the Light of Modern Science* in the July QJS.
- 1871 WC's famous series of tests with DDH and Kate Fox. Reports those with DDH in July QJS, *Experimental Investigation of a New Force*. Forwards account of his experiments to the Royal Society on June 15. Invites the two secretaries to his laboratory to meet DDH. On June 20 writes, 'I consider it my duty to send first to the Royal Society, for by so doing I deliberately stake my scientific reputation on the truth of what I send.'
The secretaries do not avail themselves of the invitation.
In October WC's article *Some Further Experiments on Psychic Force* published in the QJS with an account of his approach to the Royal Society.
In the October *Quarterly Review* a furious anonymous attack, known to have emanated from Dr Carpenter, Registrar of London University, and a distinguished biologist.

WC's reply in December QJS *Psychic Force and Modern Spiritualism: a Reply to the Quarterly Review*.

In S, June 15, first published reference to FC's mediumship in article *A New Medium* by T. Blyton, sec. Dalston Association of Enquirers into Spiritualism.

FC sits several times with mediums Williams and Herne. 'Katie King', one of their presiding spirit controls, alleged daughter of 'John King', thereafter becomes the control at FC's sittings.

- 1871-2 Joint sittings of Herne with FC. Also of FC with Mr & Mrs Holmes, American mediums, later accused of fraud.
Herne is denounced in fraud by Harrison, editor of S.
Accounts of FC's mediumship fill pages of S from now on.
FC receives financial support from Charles Blackburn.
- 1872 WC attends number of seances with FC.
FC dismissed from her post as school-teacher in Hackney.
(May) KC entranced for first time. Spirit-form 'Lily Gordon' later becomes control.
(May) RS, aged 16, appears as medium. Spirit-form FM.
- 1873 KK becomes a full-form materialization, walking and talking with sitters in seance room.
Nov. 1873 to Feb. 1874 WC has series of apparently successful sittings with medium Charles Williams.
(Dec.) A Mr Volckman seizes the spirit-form KK and declares it is FC. Immediately thereafter, FC states, she visited WC and asked for an investigation.
- 1874 WC's *Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena called Spiritual during the years 1870-1873* in QJS for Jan.
(Jan.-May) Following the Volckman exposure CB is excluding the public from FC's sittings. Management placed in WC's hands.
(Feb.) Varley electrical test used with FC. WC and Varley assert she successfully passes the test.
(10 Apr.) WC announces in S that KK and FM had been 'walking about in my laboratory with their arms entwined schoolgirl fashion, and in a strong light'.
In S, Feb. 6, Apr. 3, WC states he has seen the entranced form of FC inside the cabinet whilst KK was materialized outside.
(June 5) WC describes farewell visit of KK: 'it was a common thing for the seven or eight of us to see Miss Cook and Katie at the same time, under the full blaze of the electric light'.
WC takes total of 44 photographs of KK in laboratory by artificial light, using five cameras.

(Apr. 29) FC married to E. E. Corner. Seances at Cook's house in Hackney take place on Apr. 30, and May 4, 9, 13, 16 & 21. At WC's house 'almost nightly' May 14-21.

(May 15) Serjeant Cox publishes account of having exposed RS in fraud. WC had sittings with RS but had not been at all happy with results.

(May 21) Farewell of KK in sitting at Hackney. Previously announced some time before (according to S from her first appearance with FC).

Sittings with FC in WC's house continue for at least 9 months with her husband's approval.

1875 WC awarded the Royal Medal from the Royal Society.

(Jan.) Experiments with Mrs Eva Fay. Extensive investigation by Myers, Sidgwick, Rayleigh and WC had been planned but did not eventuate. WC takes over the investigation. He uses an electrical test with success.

(June) Mrs Crookes writes in a letter to FC (published in S of June 21) that KK's successor, a spirit-form 'Leila', had appeared 20-30 times in their own house, sometimes with visitors present; and in 3 other houses.

(Nov.) Letters from WC to DDH state that RS had confessed to Mrs Fay that her 'manifestations were all a trick' and how they had been accomplished. WC obtained a written confession from RS, promising not to expose her publicly if she promised to give up 'these tricks', but only to warn private friends. She stated that she had accomplices, and WC tells DDH that of the gentlemen implicated 'one of them (unnamed) has before now written shameful things' about him. (This might implicate Luxmoore, a letter from whom, otherwise uncorroborated, reports a case for assault brought by WC against FC's husband.)

KC's mediumship comes into prominence, following development of FC's: first 'spirit faces', then spirit writing, finally full-form materialization 'Lillie Gordon'. Viewed with suspicion in several quarters. No evidence of any interest from WC.

1876 CB's entire interest transferred to KC and her LG. CB gives increasing financial support to KC and Cook family.

Sometime after 1875 FC's 'Leila' replaced by 'Marie', the central figure until her death. The Marie sittings fall into two periods: 1875/6 to 1881, and 1890's to 1903. From 1881-90 a long break in FC's mediumistic activities.

1877 (Apr.) KC's LG first emerges in full materialization. She starts series of letters to CB in direct spirit-writing.

1880 Sir George Sitwell exposes FC impersonating a spirit-form.

1884 CB and Cook family move into new home in London together.

1891 CB dies, leaving most of his fortune to the Cook family.

1892 FC has sittings in Usk with 'Florence Marryat', authoress and friend. CB alleged to communicate.

1893 Anderson visits FC and afterwards stated she became his mistress. Liaison continued for several months.

1896 WC President of S.P.R. In *Proc.* VI (1889-90) published his *Notes on Seances with D. D. Home* but nothing concerning materializations with other mediums.

1897 WC knighted.

1898 WC President of British Association. In his Presidential Address he alludes to his psychical research: 'I have nothing to retract. I adhere to my already published statements. I only regret a certain crudity in those early expositions which, no doubt justly, militated against their acceptance by the scientific world.'

FC sittings with Lt. Col. Le Mesurier Taylor (SPR member).

1899 FC visits Germany and later Warsaw. Warsaw Committee comment: 'miserable badly-conducted comedy'. However, many reports in her favour between 1899 and 1903.

1901 Capt. (later Sir Ernest) Bennett favourably impressed by FC's spirit-form 'Marie'.

FC leaves Wales and lives at 20 Battersea Rise, London, S.W.11.

1903 FC sittings with Miss Dallas (SPR member).

1904 FC dies of pneumonia in Battersea.

1907 E. E. Corner marries FC's sister KC.

1910 WC awarded Order of Merit.

1913 WC President of Royal Society.

1916 (May) Death of Lady Crookes. WC much stricken.

1919 (April) Death of WC.

1923 KC dies of apoplexy.

1928 Death of Capt. Corner.

1922 & 1949 F. G. H. Anderson visits the S.P.R.

1960 T. H. Hall publishes *The Spiritualists*.

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THE ANDERSON TESTIMONY

In most of the reviews of Mr Hall's book great emphasis, in fact undue emphasis, was laid on the testimony of Mr F. G. H. Anderson, concerning his relationship and conversations with Mrs Corner (Florence Cook).

Some of the weaknesses in Anderson's testimony and in the recent treatment of it have already been brought out in discussion in the Society's publications and elsewhere. We intend to present some further relevant material and discussion in another journal. Meantime, readers are referred to the following issues of the S.P.R. *Journal* which deal with the testimony and with criticisms concerning S.P.R. procedure after it had been given, and include correspondence etc. relating to Sir William Crookes.

- (1) September 1962, pp. 372-7; Review of *The Spiritualists* by W. H. Salter; pp. 389-92, Letters from J. Pearce-Higgins and K. M. Goldney.
- (2) December 1962, pp. 437-42, Letters from E. J. Dingwall, M. Gilbert and G. Zorab.
- (3) March 1963, pp. 31-3, Letters from W. H. Salter and A. Slomann.
- (4) June 1963, pp. 93-7, *The 'Anderson Testimony'*.
- (5) September 1963, pp. 140-6, Letters from R. H. Thouless, C. D. Broad and G. Barnard.
- (6) December 1963, pp. 203-8, Letter from R. H. Thouless.